TIRUVĀYMOḺI
ENGLISH GLOSSARY

VOLUME I

by

(Jñāna Bhakti Bhūṣaṇa)

S. SATYAMURTHI AYYANGAR, GWALIOR

Published with the financial assistance from the Government of India, Ministry of Education & Social Welfare (Department of Education)

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Bhakti Movement in South India

The bhakti movement in South India came to the fore during the sixth to the ninth centuries A.D. This was the period in which many mystic poets, both the Nāyaṇmārs of Saivism and the Āḻvārs of Śrīvaiṣṇavism, went about singing the praises of the Lord. They wandered from place to place and composed their hymns in praise of the particular deity in that place.

The subject matter of all Tamil poetry has traditionally been categorised as broadly two—akam and puṟam. Akam (' internal ') is what pertains to the individual and the private, the inner, the introvert. Puṟam (' external ') is what pertains to the public man, king or officer, the outer, the extrovert. Love poetry will come under akam and the poetry of heroism or war under puṟam.

The intense devotion which the Nāyaṇmārs and Āḻvārs felt towards God would normally come under akam. The Vaishnavite Āḻvārs went one step further than their contemporary Nāyaṇmārs thinking of this devotion in terms not so much of man and God as of man and his beloved, whether a child (Periyāḻvār) or a lover (Āṇṭāḷ). The human soul longs for God as a woman for his sweetheart. It is the theme of the Biblical *Song of Songs* but with the roles reversed—not the man singing for the woman but the woman for the man. The parallel to this in western religious literature is the mystical poetry of St. Theresa with its passionate love for Jesus.

Recital of Hymns in Temples

The chanting of hymns in Saivite as well as Vaiṣṇava temples was in vogue long before the time of Rāmānuja. There are inscriptions relating to the reign of Pārantaka I at Lalgudi and Allur in the Tiruchirapalli district from which it is seen that provision had been made for singing the 'Tiruppadiyam' in Saivite

temples.[1] There are similar references in inscriptions dating right from the time of Raja Raja Cola which go to prove that provision was made for the chanting of Tiruvāymoḷi by Tiruvāymoḷi Tēvar in Vaiṣṇava temples.[2] Not only the hymns, Tiruvāymoḷi, of Nammāḷvār but the hymns of other Āḷvārs also were chanted in the temples on particular occasions.[3]

Codification of Hymns

It is an interesting feature of the bhakti movement in South India that the codifications of the Saivite hymns by Nampi Āṇṭār Nampi and of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava hymns, Divya Prabandams, by Nāthamuni were effected more or less about the same period and in the same region.[4] Nāthamuṉi's period must have been around the end of the ninth and the beginning of the tenth centuries.

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[1] At Lālguḍi and Allūr in the Trichinopoly district are found inscriptions of the reigon of Parāntaka I, providing for Brahmins singing the Tiruppadiyam during the daily service in the temples. Earlier than Parāntaka's reign, in the reign of the Pallava Vijaya - Nandi-Vikrama Varman, reciters of the Tiruppadiyam are enumerated in the list of persons employed in the service of a temple at Tiruvallam.

(*Page 637, The Colas, K. A. Nilakanta Sastri*)

[2] The mention of Tiru-Vāymoḷidevar in an inscription at Ukkal in Rājarāja's reign, and of the recitation of Tiruppadiyam in Viṣṇu temples is enough to show the parallelism in practice between Saivism and Vaiṣṇavism in this respect.

(*Page 639, The Colas, K. A. Nilakanta Sastri*)

[3] The fact that the hymn of Kulaśekhara-āḷvār beginning tettarundiṟal was recited before the deity during three nights in the course of a festival in Srirangam is mentioned in an inscription of A.D. 1088.

(*Page 639, The Colas, K. A. Nilakanta Sastri*)

[4] Tradition confers upon Nathamuni the honour of having done for Vaiṣṇava lyrics what Nambi Āṇḍār Nambi achieved for the Śaiva ones. If Śrīnātha who seems to be mentioned in the Anbil plates may be taken to be the same as the Vaiṣṇava Saint Nāthamuni, his age would be the end of the ninth and the beginning of the tenth centuries A.D., and this accords well with the other testimony we have, meagre as it is, on the subject.

(*Page 638, The Colas, K. A. Nilakanta Sastri*)

As per the traditional account Nāthamuṉi once heard some visitors to his place from Kurukūr, the birth place of Nammāḷvār, recite a hymn of ten verses from *Tiruvāymoḷi*. He was enchanted by the melody of the hymn. Realising that they were only part of a thousand verses composed by Nammāḷvār, Nāthamuṉi journeyed to Kurukūr in the hope of discovering the remaining verses. At Kurukūr, Nāthamuṉi worshipped Lord Viṣṇu and then repaired to the foot of the tamarind tree under which Nammāḷvār had spent his time, in the hope of having the Darśan of Nammāḷvār. He was disappointed however. Then he started reciting Madhura Kavi's ten stanzas in praise of his guru, Nammāḷvār. When he recited those stanzas 12,000 times, both Nammāḷvār and Madhura Kavi appeared before him and imparted to him the knowledge of the four works of Nammāḷvār. Thereafter Nāthamuṉi stayed on in Kurukūr, meditating upon the Prabhandas, till he was summoned to his native place Vīranārāyaṇapuram by the deity of that place. And in his native place he and his disciples spent their time chanting the hymns.

Apart from tradition, it is now accepted that it was Nāthamuṉi who codified the hymns, Divyaprabandhams, of the Āḷvārs, as mentioned in the Guruparampara prabhāvam.[5]

The Concept of Ubhaya Vedānta

One of the most important contributions of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas is the establishment of the concept of Ubhaya Vedānta, *i.e.*, the equal validity of both the Sanskrit śruti or revealed texts and the Tamil hymns of the Āḷvārs, those who had immersed themselves in God and his qualities.

The history behind the concept of 'Ubhaya-Vedānta' is most significant for it depicts the way in which the hymns of the Āḷvārs came to be considered as Vedānta in Tamil. According to the Acārya Hṛdayam, the Vedas as we know are śruti, *i.e.* what was heard or revealed, and anādi *i.e.*, without beginning or authorship. They are the supreme authority. The Tamil hymns are equally claimed to be "anādi" in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition. They have a 'beginning', ādi, from the Āḷvārs only in the sense that the latter

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[5] Guruparamparā Prabhāvam—Āṟāyirappati, page 120.

were the instruments through which the Supreme Lord, Nārāyaṇa, revealed His will. He says that like 'śruti' which was given by Lord to Brahmā, Divya Prabhandhams were also given by Lord to the Āḷvārs.[6] Āḷvārs started giving equal status to Tamil al ng with Sanskrit. For instance, Kulasekhara Āḷvār in his Perumāḷtirumoḻi refers to Lord as the northern language, Sanskrit, and the poem of sweet joy in Tamil.[7]

Tirumaṅkai Āḷvar in his Tiruneṭuntāṇṭakam describes the Lord as one who is in the form of the sound of Tamil, which has the power of expression and who is in the form of the Sanskrit word, Vaṭacol. It is worthy of note here that the Alvar gives prime importance to Tamil which has felicity in expression and only refers later to Sanskrit without any qualifying epithet for the northern language. In the same stanza, Tirumaṅkai Āḷvār calls the Lord as the mantra of Vedānta, denoting that all the Upanishads describe only Him. From this one can glean that the Āḷvār is attaching equal significance to Tamil, Sanskrit and Vedānta, who is God Himself, the primordial cause of everything.[8]

Maturakavi, a direct disciple of Saṭakopan, says about his ācārya, as "He who composed the stanzas through which the inner meaning of the Veda of the great Vetiyars (Brahmins) is established in my heart."[9]

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[6] Ācārya hṛdayam Cūrṇikai 41,
  ,,   ,, 49.

[7] Antamiḻinpapaviṉai avvaṭamoli yai ppaṟṟaṟṟārkaḷ........

(*Perumāḷ tirumoḻi—1-4*)

[8] intiraṟkum piramaṟkum mutalvaṉtaṉṉai irunilam kāl tī nīr viṇ ptūam aintāy
centiṟattatamḻiocai vaṭacollāki ticaināṉkumāy tiṅkaḷ ñāyiṟāki
antarattil tevarkkaum aṟiyalākā aṅtaṇaṉai antaṇarmāṭṭu antivaitta
mantirattai manirattāl maṟavātu eṉṟum vāḻutiyēl vaḷalām maṭaneñcamē.

(*Tiruneṭuntāṇṭakam, 4*)

[9] mikkavētiyar vētattiṉuṭporuḷ niṟkappāṭi yenneñcuḷ niṟuttināṉ
takkacīr caṭakopaneṉ nampikku āḷ pukkakātal aṭimaip payaṉaṉṟē.

(*Kaṇṇinuṇciruttāmpu, 9*)

Maturakavi says that Saṭakopaṉ has mercifully sung one thousand sweet hymns in Tamil, which would make happy the devotees, who forever engage themselves in praising the glory of the Lord.[10]

Yāmuna does not refer to Tiruvāymoḻi as Drāvida Veda, but in Stotraratna he does pay homage to the feet of Vakulābharaṇa, Nammāḷvār, whom he calls the first Ācārya (Stanza-5). Many of Yāmuna's ideas are parallel to those of the Āḷvārs. It includes for instance, a direct translation from Kulasekhara in Stanza 26 of Stotraratna[11].

Guruparampara records that as part of his temple reforms Ramānuja included the chanting of hymns of the Divya Prabandha.[12] The author of Ācārya Hṛdayam has recorded that Rāmānuja used to explain the Brahma-sūtras with the aid of Tiruvāymoḻi.[13]

That the Divya Prabandhas had been accepted by Śrīvaiṣṇavas as equivalent to the Sanskrit Vedas as part of regular temple worship is evident from the reference to Nammāḷvar in the Stotras

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[10] Aruḷkoṅṭāṭum aṟiyavar iṉpuṟa
aruḷiṉāṉ avvarumaṟaiyinporuḷ
aruḷkoṅṭu āyiram iṉtamiḷ pāṭināṉ
aruḷ kaṅtīr ivvulakinilmikkatē.

(*Kaṇṇinuṉciruttāmpu, 8*)

[11] ar ciṉattāl īṉṟatāy akaṟṟiṭinum maṟṟavaḷtaṉ aruḷ ninainte aḻumkuḷavi atuvē poṉṟiruntēṉē.

(*Kulacekara, Perumāḷtirumoḻi, 5 : 1*)

ruṣā nirastopi śiśuḥ stanandhayaḥ najātu matuḥ carnaṇau jihāsati.

(*Yāmuna, Stotraratna, sta. 26*)

[12] Guruparamparā prabhāvam—pp. 181 ff.

[13] Bhāṣyakārar itukoṅṭu sūtra
vyākhyānaṅkaḷ oruṅku viṭuvar.

(*Āāryahṛdayam—cu-65*)

of some of the direct disciples of Rāmānuja, like Kūresa and his son, Parāsara Bhattar.[14]

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[14] (*a*) Traividya Vṛdha jana mūrdha vibhūṣanam yat
Sampat ca sātvikajanasya Yadeva nityam.
Yadvā Saraṇyam Asaraṇya janasya pumsām
Tat Samsrayēma Vakuḷābharaṇa anghriyugmam.

(*Śrīvaikunṭha Stavam—2*)
Kuresa

" Let us prostrate before the lotus feet of *Nammalvar*, the only refuge for even the indifferent and the uncared for. Bow before those feet which are simultaneously a unique treasure house for the Sattvikas and an incoparable jewel on their heads."

(*Stanza—2*)

(*b*) Baktiprabhāva bhavadadbhu ta bhava
Sandhuksita pranayasāra rasougha punah.
Vedārtharatna nidhiḥ acyutadivya dhāmā
Jīyāt parañkusa pyodhirsīma bhūmā.

(*Śrī Vaikunṭha Stavam—3*)
Kuresa

" Hail to Nammalvar who competes with the ocean in his qualities of divine love: immeasurable is his love for the Lord, even as the full waters of the ocean. Variegated and most wonderful are the myriad moods of his love for Him (the Nava-rasas even as the ocean contains unheard of treasures) Immortal shall he be who is our and our Lord's pride of possession ".

(*Stanza—3*)

(*c*) Vakuladhara Sarasvatī viṣakta Svrararasa bhāvayutasu kinnarīṣu.
dravati dṛṣadapi prasakta gānāsu iha vanaśaila tatiṣu Sundrasya.

(*Sundara bahusṭava*—12)
Kuresa

The very stones melt, when kinnara maidens, who are endowed with perception of swara, rasa and bhava, sing the " Saraswati of Vakuladhara " (hymns of Nammalvar), from the valleys of ' Sundara ' hill —(Alakarmalai) ".

(*d*) Rṣim juṣāmahe kṛṣṇa tṛṣṇātatvam ivoditam.
Sahasra sākhām yodrāksit drāviḍīm braha Sanyanitam

(*Śrī rangarājastava—6* (*Parāśara Bhaṭṭar*)

" We bow before that saint Nammalvar who perceived the Brahma samhita (Upanishad) in Tamil, having a thousand branches and who is the very personification, as it were, of the thirst for Kisna."

Though Nāthamuṉi and Āḷavandar were instrumental in introducing the chanting of the Divya Prabandham in Vaiṣṇava temples, it was Rāmānuja who systematised it and arranged for the chanting of hymns as an integral part of the temple ritual. This is borne out by the inscriptions relating to the post-Rāmānuja period.[15] This is also known from the Koyil oḷuku, which is a recorded document on the Srirangam temple routine from the time of Rāmānuja.

The concluding session in Śrīvaiṣṇava daily or special worship, as in the case of a festival of the presiding deity or Āḷvār or Ācārya, has an important item called ' Cāṟṟumuṟai ', which marks the end of the recitation of the Divya Prabandham. After the recital of the last two verses of each work of the Āḷvār followed by two verses of Tiruppallāṇṭu, two verses are sung which m an the following: " May the divine command of the venerable Rāmānuja. grow stronger and stronger, with its powers unobstructed in all places and on all occasions and at all times. May the divine command of Rāmānuja shine forth every day and pervade all places, for it aims at the welfare of all the worlds. O Lord, please make the glory of Śrīrangam grow strong every day without any hindrance. "[16]

It may also be noted that Rāmānuja's systematisation of temple worship is adopted even in domestic worship, which is is followed by Cāṟṟumuṟai. Further, the influence of Rāmānuja

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[15] **Divyaprabhandha recital in vaisnava Temples.**—Dr. K. V. Raman

(*Śrī Rāmanuja Vāṇī—October 1979, pp. 33ff*).

[16] Sarvadèsa sadākāleṣu avyāhata parākramā.
rāmānujārya divyājñyā vardhatām abhivardhatām.
rāmānujārya divyājñyā prativāsarm ujvalā.
Digantavyāpinīu bhūyat sāhi lokahitaiṣinī.

(*Śrīmanna Śrīrangaśriyam anupadravā anudinam savardhaya*)

can also be seen in the singing of the hymns of Āḻvārs in marriage ceremonies and in obsequies.[17]

Śrī Nammāḻvār

Śrī Nammāḻvār was born at Tirukkurukūr, also known as Āḻvār tirunakari, in the Vēlālar Community of fourth Varṇa. His parents were Kāri and Uṭaiya Naṅkai. He was given the name, Māṟan by his parents.

It is said that as soon as he was born, he was so absorbed in the contemplation of God that he would not eat or drink but soon took up residence under a tamarind tree and remained there. He radiated a saintly effulgence which could be seen from far and wide. In fact, Matura Kavi who was on tour in the North saw it and hastened to the South, following the direction of the effulgence. He reached the city of the Āḻvār and located the Tamarind tree under which Nammāḻvār was seated. There the meeting took place between these two great souls, Nammāḻvār and Matura Kavi, the latter himself one of the Āḻvārs. Matura Kavi saw with wonder that Nammāḻvār did not take any food or water and would also not talk to anybody. He put the question to him: "A little thing born in a dead body, what will it eat and where will it live?" Nammāḻvār replied: "It will eat that and lie there." Matura Kavi realised that Nammāḻvār meant that though the body is a dead thing and soul infinitely small, it had the capacity to stay in the body and live on it. By this Nammāḻvār sought also to convey

[17] The ten stanzas of "Nācciyār Tirumoḻi" beginning with "Vāraṇamāyiram", where Āṇṭāḷ dreams of her marriage with Lord Nārāyaṇa, are usually sung during the weddings of the south Indian Śrī Vaiṣṇavite community. This may well be taken as an index of the deep penetrative influence of the hymns of Āḻvārs on the social life of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava Community.

Before the commencement of funeral ceremonies in (case of death to the members of) the Śrī Vaiṣṇava community when the dead body (prēta) is washed and the caste mark applied, at least a hundred stanzas of Nammāḻvār are chanted. This is done as if to indicate the longing of the individual soul to reach the lotus feet of the Lord. Similarly, at the conclusion of the ceremonies on the 13th day, thousand hymns of Nammāḻvār (*i.e.* Tiruvāymoḻi) are chanted to signify the liberation of the soul.

that emancipated souls, though finite and small, dwell in God and God is their food, wealth, mind, wisdom, bliss and everything. He himself has spoken of service of God as the greatest gift of God, exceeding even the matter of liberation from the cycle of births. The teachings of Nammāḻvār are said to be capable of liberating anyone. His influence on the course of religious history was enormous.

The place of Nammāḻvār in Śrī vaiṣṇavism can be gauged from the fact that he is held to be the most important among the Āḻvārs. When one considers that he was of the fourth *varṇa*, one can understand the height to which a person can rise by the love of God. His very name, Nammāḻvār, our Āḻvār, shows the esteem and affection in which he is held in the Śrīvaiṣṇva community. He is also known as Saṭakopa, which is a symbol representing the Lord's feet are placed on the devotee's head in reverential worship. He himself had stated: " By becoming servants of the Lord, we have verily become, as it were, His sacred sandals" (Tiruvantāti-31). Besides Tiruvāymoḻi, his other works are: Tiruviruttam, Tiruvāciriyam and Periya Tiruvantāti.

Matura Kavi Āḻvār

The meeting of Matura Kavi and Nammāḻvār has already been described. Nammāḻvār's statement that he was enjoying God, as his food and resting in God made Matura Kavi realise the profound truth in it; then and there he chose Nammāḻvār as his ācārya. He learned all the hymns of the great saint and followed the method of bhakti and prapatti scrupulously. The traditional accounts include him among the Āḻvārs, though with a difference. While all other Āḻvārs enjoyed the mystic vision of God and His infinite auspicious attributes, Matura Kavi sang about the glory of Nammāḻvār alone in his only composition. It is called 'Kaṇṇinuṇ Ciruttāmpu' in which he sings the praise of Nammāḻvār or Saṭakōpaṉ. The fact that he has been elevated on the strength of this only work, demonstrates the significance of the deep devotion to Ācaryas.

Status of Devotees

Vedānta Desika in the Chapter 'Prabhāva Vyavasthādhikāra' of his work 'Rahasya Traya Sāra' discusses elaborately on devotees

born in a lower varṇa. He refers to the Purāṇas wherein it has been stated that a devotee, even though of a lower varna, is superior to one of a higher varna who is not a devotee.

Vedānta Desika held firm views on varṇas and the Varṇāśrama Dharma. According to him a person born in a lower varṇa and who is a devotee of Lord Visnu is venerable! This veneration does not make the devotee get the social status of a higher varṇa. To establish this, Vedānta Desika has mentioned the simile of the Surabhi, Kamadhenu, which furnishes all that people desire, but is still a cow. The same thing applies to the Bhāgavata, who should be venerated but who cannot change his varṇa.

Vedānta Desika discusses about this elaboıately in this chapter and cites the cases of Vyādha and Tulādhara. These two, though born in a lower Varṇa and thus ineligible to study the Vedas or teach them, were still able to clarify the doubts of the Brahmins who approached them for clarification on points in the Vedas. Desika says that they were like guides who direct travellers who had strayed into the foıest. Vyādha and Tulādhara were important only for guidance but could not became members of a higher Varṇa. As regards Āḷvārs, according to Vedānta Desika, they were of a special category and could not be classified with mortals. In his Guru Paramparāsāram, he calls the ten Āḷvārs as the Navina Dasāvatara, or the new ten incarnations of this Lord.

While discussing the question of Nammāḷvār's birth, Aḷakiya Maṇavāḷa Perumāl Nāyaṉār in his Ācārya Hṛdayamit compares to that of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa Dvāipāyaṇa, Vyāsa, but with a difference. Śrī Kṛṣṇa was born in prison in Matura and was brought up by his foster-mother, Yasoda in Gokulam. Vyāsa was born to Machcha Gandhi and was also not brought up by her. But Nammāḷvār was born in Tirukurukūr. and brought up by his parents. The places of birth of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Vyāsa and Nammāḷvār are also significant. Śrī Kṛṣṇa was born in prison and Vyāsa on the sea-shore whereas Nammalvar was born in a town in a fertile region on the bank of river Tamiraparaṇi.

According to the author of Ācārya Hṛdayam, the principles of Varṇāśrama Dhaıma cannot be applied to the devotees of the Lord, Those who do so are ignorant and wallowing in darkness. Further

he cites the cases of Tiruppaṇāḷvār, Tirukacci Nampi and Kurumpu Aṛutta Nampi, who were born in lower Varṇas. He also compares Nammāḷvār's case to that of Varahavatara and Kṛṣṇavatāra. In Varāhāvatāra, the Lord incarnated as a boar to redāeem the earth. In Kṛṣṇāvatāra, the Lord was born among the cow-herds to uplift them. In the same way Nammāḷvār was born in a lower varṇa to uplift mankind.

From the above, it will be seen that these two ācāryas approach the matter of Nammāḷvār's birth in a lower varṇa from different angles. Vedānta Desika says that the matter of birth in a lower Varṇa should not be taken into account in the case of Āḷvārs. Aḷakiya Maṇavāḷa Perumāl Nāyaṉār, a younger contemporary of Vedanta Desika says that Nammalvar was born in low varna purposely to uplift mankind, just as in the case of Kṛṣṇāvatāra and Varāhāvatāra.

Commentaries on Tiruvāymoḻi

Upto the time of Rāmānuja, devotees and disciples learned the subtlety and meanings of Tiruvāymoḷi only by word of mouth, in a continuous Ācārya-Siṣya tradition. The first recorded commentary on Tiruvāymoḷi was by Tirukkurukai Pirāṉ Piḷḷāṉ, a disciple of Rāmānuja, who wrote it as per the instruction of his preceptor. I was called *Ārāyirappaṭi*. (Six thousand 'Paṭi's, A paṭi consists of 32 letters.) In fact all the five important commentaries on Tiruvāymoḷi, so far have this suffix 'paṭi' added on to their titles). The other commentaries are briefly described below:

Onpatiṉāyirappaṭi. This was written by Nañcīyar who learned Tiruvāymoḷi from his ācārya, Parasara Bhaṭṭar. This is more elaborate than Arayirappaṭi. In this, Naṉcīyar stresses the importance of the Tamil language as a vehicle for spiritual revelation. Nañcīyar's contribution to Śrī Vaiṣṇavism is important.

Pannır Ayirappaṭi. The author of this commentary is Vāti Keari Aḷakiya Mañavāḷa De ikara disciple of Periya vāccāṉ Pillai. Almost illiterate in the beginning, he had the good fortune to be blessed with the grace of his preceptor and became erudite and wıote many scholarly treatises, including this commentary.

T—B

Irupattinalayirappati. This commentary is written by Periya Vāccāṉ Piḷḷai, a disciple of Nampiḷḷai. Periya Vāccāṉ Piḷḷai's contribution to the Maṇipravāḷa Literature is significant. Because of his methodical and systematic approach in his treaties, he was given the title 'Vyakhānacakravartin', emperor of commentators.

Muppattiārāyirappaṭi. Of all the commentaries of Tiruvāymoḻi, that have gained prominence so far, this is considered to be the most exhaustive. This is also known as 'ĪṬU' and is held in high esteem by Śrīvaiṣṇavites. The author of this commentary was Vaṭakku Tiruvīti Piḷḷai, another disciple of Nampiḷḷai. This is supposed to have been recorded after listening to the discourses of Nampillai. This work is accepted as a scripture by all Tenkalai Śrī vaiṣṇavas and the followers of Ahobila Mutt of the Vaṭakalai tradition.

Acknowledgement

It is our duty to acknowledge with grateful thanks the literary and financial help received from diverse sources in the presentation of this work. Mr. S. Satyamurti Ayengar, Retired Officer of the Indian Audit Department, is deeply interested in Śrivaiṣṇava tradition and has undergone "Kālakshepam" with Srī U. Ve. P. B. Annangarāchariār Swami among others. The English Glossary of Tiruvāymoḻi, which we are presenting is a good example of the traditional approach.

As a supplement to the first volume, we are presenting a booklet by Prof. David Kaylor and Dr. K. K. A. Venkatachari entitled, "God far; God near"—An Interpretation of the Thought of Nammāḻvār, which is a critical appreciation of the original text of Tiruvaymoli and the philosophy found in the hymns as seen by these authors.

A munificent grant by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, has been vital for publishing this work and the Institute is thankful to the Government for enabling us thereby no foster the pursuit of research and study in Indology. We are thankful to the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, who, as ever, have come forward to our aid with financial assistance. To Prof. David Kaylor, our thanks are due not only for intellectual but also financial participation in the publication.

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Bombay.
7th February, 1981.

K. K. A. VENKATACHARI,
Founder Director.

TAṈIYAṈ

(1) [*Invocation by Śrīman Nāthamuni]

Bhaktāmṛtaṁ viśvajana anumodanaṁ
Sarvārthadam Śrī Śaṭhakopa Vāṅgmayaṁ
Sahasra śākhopaniṣad samāgamaṁ
Namāmyahaṁ drāvida Veda Sāgaraṁ.

Translation

Worship do I the Ocean of Tamil Vedas,
The aggregate of the Upaniṣads, having thousands of branches, spelt out by Śaṭhakopa,
The ambrosia for God-lovers,
Which regales all alike [the denizens of the Universe as well as the Supreme Lord, the granter of all felicities]

Note

Tiruvāymoḻi is likened to an ocean. Once upon a time, the ocean was churned and the ambrosia, that came up, was offered to the Devas, the Lord's devotees. Likewise, Tiruvāymoḻi feeds the devotees with the nectarean sweetness of its contents. Again, the ocean delights the beholders, one and all, any length of time. Similarly, Tiruvāymoḻi, the 'Drāviḍa Veda Sāgaraṁ', regales one and all in the whole Universe, from the Supreme Lord downwards, without satiety.

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* Invocations (Taṉiyaṉ) (1) to (6) comprising one Sanskrit Śloka and five Tamil verses, composed by the devotees of Saint Nammāḻvār, do not form part of the Text of Tiruvāymoḻi, as such, but are, as a rule, recited at the commencement of the chanting of Tiruvāymoḻi.

(2) [Invocation by Īśvaramuni]

Tiruvaḻuti nāteṉṟum Teṉkurukūreṉṟum
Maruviṉiya vaṇporunaleṉṟum — arumaṟaikaḷ
Antāti ceytāṉaṭiyiṇaiyē eppoḻutum
Cintiyāy neñcē teḷintu.

Translation

My mind! thou shalt, for ever, contemplate, as your sole refuge,
The feet of the one [Saint Nammāḻvār], who rendered the abstruse Sanskrit Veda, in lucid Tamil verses,
Skilfully composed, adoring, as well, his birthplace, namely, *Teṉkurukūr*, in the region called *Tiruvaḻuti* and the exhilarating river *Tāmraparṇi* on whose bank it stands.

(3) [Invocation by Coṭṭainampi]

Maṉattālum vāyālum vaṇkurukūr pēṇum
Iṉattāraiyallātiṟaiñcēṉ — taṉattālum
Ētum kuṟaivilēṉ — Entai Caṭakōpaṉ
Pātaṅkaḷ yāmuṭaiya paṟṟu.

Translation

Leaning, as I do, on the feet of Śaṭhakopa, my Sire,
I am above wants; I shall adore none
But those whose mind and mouth venerate *Tirunakari*,
His birth place.

(4) [Invocation by Anantāḻvāṉ]

Ēynta peruṅkīrtti yirāmānuca muṉitaṉ
Vāynta malarppātam vaṇaṅkukiṉṟēṉ — āyntaperum
Cīrār Caṭakōpaṉ Centamiḻvētam tarikkum
Pērāta uḷḷam peṟa.

Translation

I adore the comely feet of Saint Rāmānuja of unrivalled fame,
So as to acquire a mind which shall stand rivetted to the Chaste Tamil Vedas,
Yielded by Caṭakōpaṉ, the repository of all auspicious qualities,
Absolutely free from all blemishes.

(5) and (6) [Invocation by Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar]

Vāṉtikaḻum cōlai matiḷaraṅkar vaṇpukaḻmēl
Āṉṟa tamiḻ maṟaikaḷāyiramum — Īṉṟa
Mutaltāy Caṭakōpaṉ — moympāl vaḷartta
Itattāy Irāmānucaṉ.

Translation

Caṭakōpaṉ was the mother, who yielded the Tamil Vedas, in a thousand stanzas, extolling the glory of *Araṅkar* (Lord Raṅganātha), Enshrined in the walled city of Śrīraṅgam, surrounded by luxurious orchards;
Rāmānuja is, however, the beneficent foster-mother,
Who sedulously nurtured these songs and made them flourish in our midst.

Mikkaviṟai nilaiyum meyyāmuyir nilaiyum
Takkaneṟiyum taṭaiyāki — tokkiyalum
Ūḻviṉaiyum vāḻviṉaiyum Ōtum Kurukaiyar Kóṉ
Yāḻiṉicai vētattiyal.

Translation

The tuneful songs of Tiruvāymoḻi of Vedic excellence,
Composed by Nammāḻvār, the chieftain of Kurukūr,
Elucidate the *nature of the Supreme Lord.*
The *nature of the eternal soul* (*Jīvā*), *the means for attaining the Lord,*
The end or the final goal and the impediments thereto.

Note

These five topics dealt with in Tirumantra, (Aum Namo Nārāyaṇāya) are elaborated upon, time and again, in Tiruvāymoḷi. The Lord is Supreme, the individual souls are His sole servitors, loving surrender unto His Sweet grace, the sole means of attaining Him, the deceitful knowledge, resulting in the individual soul straying away into the domain of sensual pleasures through the media of the foul bodies, constitutes the impediment to the attainment of the Lord, service to the Lord, without break or blemish, is the ultimate goal.

VOLUME I

Tiruvāymoḻi

First Centum – First Tiruvāymoḻi (I-1)
(Uyarvu aṟa Uyar Nalam)

Note

This work comprises ten centums, or hundred decades, each of which is called a 'Tiruvāymoḻi', which means 'Inspired utterance' as well as 'Divnie speech', the speech from the holy mouth of the Saint. This is a skilled poetic composition in which each stanza begins with the closing word of the previous stanza or the phonetic sound therecf. Unlike the other hymns of the 'Divya Prabandha', Tiruvāymoḻi is accorded the special status of being chanted only inside the temples or at homes when the Deity is seated for congregational worship, and not when the Deity is taken out in the streets in ceremonial procession.

Preamble

In the opening song, the Saint exhorts his chastened mind to adore the dazzling, distress-dispelling feet of the Lord, the Supreme Benefactor, and attain salvaticn. Right at the very start, and that too in the opening line itself, the Āḻvār characterises God as one with perfections, all of the nature of bliss and love, the natural repository of innumerable auspicious traits of unlimited dimensions and thus easily scores over the 'Upaniṣad', which made a futile attempt to gauge the immeasurable bliss of the Supreme Lord and had to acknowledge defeat.*

Such a beginning is the natural corollary to the manner in which the Lord captivated the Āḻvār. It was by exhibiting His innumerable auspicious qualities that the Lord attracted

* Yato vāco nivartante aprāpya manasāsaha.

the Āḻvār, and therefore it was that he began with an ardent adoration of those very qualities, literally strangling those philosophising on a God devoid of form, attributes etc. as the illustrious Kūrattāḻvāṉ would put it. Exulting over the fact that we have, on Saint Nammāḻvār's authority, a God of attributes, which ought to silence all those who philosophise on a God devoid of attributes, Kūrattāḻvāṉ would say Viṣṇupurāṇa (VI-5-84) corroborates this: it says the Lord is the essence possessing all blissful perfections. Does not Karṇa say, in the Bhīṣmaparva of the Mahābhārata, that even if all the worlds were assembled together and they were all to praise the perfections of the great victorious Viṣṇu (born as Kṛṣṇa, son of Vasudēva, bearing the discus, conch and sword) for millions of years it would not be exhaustive ? Did not Tārā tell Vāli, her husband, that, in Rāma, the noblest glories meet? Again, did not the subjects, assembled in King Daśaratha's court, proclaim that in all the earth none possessed the excellence of Rāma who, richly blest with graces, was to their hearts very dear? In the eleventh verse of his 'Stotra Ratna', Saint Yāmuna describes the Lord as one possessing an infinitude of super-excellent, auspicious perfections, conformable to His divine character".

It may, however, be questioned how the Āḻvār relegated himself to the lower order of submission to the Lord through an appreciation of His auspicious traits instead of being automatically linked up with the Lord by virtue of the inherent trait (Śeṣatva or servitude) of the Individual Soul, as His eternal servant. Actually, it is not a case of relegation, as such, and it has to be taken that all the noblest qualities that converge in the Lord constitute yet another tangible source of attraction for the individual soul. That there has been no departure from the basic stand of Master-servant relationship between the Lord and the Āḻvār is brought out clearly in the fifth centum, third Tiruvāymoḻi, fifth stanza (indicated here and elsewhere by the notation V-3-5). There, in a moment of desolation caused by the snapping of his communion with the Lord, Nammāḻvār bitterly reproaches the Lord as extremely selfish, unsympathetic, elusive, time-serving, deceitful, unfathomable etc.

and yet he finds his 'tyrannical' mind clinging to the Lord, as the Sole Refuge, under all circumstances. The examples of Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā can also be brought in here, to clarify the stand of the Āḻvār. According to his own admission to Hanumān when Lakṣmaṇa first met him in the mountain slope of Ṛśyamūkha parvata,* Lakṣmaṇa was enthralled into serving Śrī Rāma and following him, even in exile, by the latter's sweet qualities. This does not, however, detract from Lakṣmaṇa's basic stance. Being an incarnation of Ādiśeṣa (first servant), Lakṣmaṇa was devoted to Rāma, right from the cradle.†

And in the above context, Lakṣmaṇa merely adduced yet another consideration for his constant attendance on Rāma. Service unto the Lord by virtue of the essential nature of the individual soul (Śeṣatva), not conditioned by any extraneous consideration or inducements is, no doubt, of primary importance and all else is relegated to a secondary place. At the same time, it has to be noted that the Lord and His excellence can never remain apart. Felicitating Sītā on her fidelity to her husband (giving up the Palace and all its wealth and relatives and following Rāma into exile), Anasūyā Dēvī, wife of Sage Atri, exhorted that the husband needs to be venerated as God Himself, be he in town or wood, well or ill. Swayed by modesty, the bashful Sītā stood with down-cast eyes and spoke out: " My love for Rāma is spontaneous and yet, people are likely to construe that I love him because of his excellence, both physical and mental. It is indeed difficult for me to prove that my fidelity to Rāma has no strings attached to it and stands by itself without any external provocation or inducements, as Rāma and his excellence can never remain apart. My fidelity will remain constant even if he were the exact reverse of what he is ".

The philosophy of 'Tattva' (truth), 'Hita' (Path) and 'Puruṣārtha' (goal), elucidated in this work, is presented in a summarised

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*** " Ahamasyāvaro bhrātā guṇair dāsyaṁ upāgataḥ ".**

† Bālyāt prabrti susnigdha.

form, in the opening stanza itself, by indicating that 'Tirumāl' (Mahāviṣṇu) is the Supreme Lord, worshipping His lustrous feet, the Supreme path, and attainment of those very feet, through His redemptive grace, the highest goal. What a grand start, going straight to the subject on hand! Of the five-fold manifestations of God, namely, 'Para', Vyūha', 'Vibhava', 'Antaryāmi' and Arcā', this decad deals with the 'Para' or the transcendental Form of the Lord and the cognate activities.*

*Actually, the first two decads of this great work embrace all that has been said in all the four cantos of the 'Brahma Sūtras', (the Mīmāmsaka Śāstra, already referred to in the Introduction), elucidated in Śrī Rāmānuja's Śrī Bhāṣya. The first six songs of the first decad cover the first Adhyāya of the Brahma sūtras, the next five songs of that decad convey the contents of the second Adhyāya of the Sūtras, the first eight songs of the second decad (Viṭumiṉ) embrace the third Adhyāya of the sūtras and the next three songs of that decad summarise the fourth and the last canto of the Sūtras. Again, decads three to hundred of Tiruvāymoḷi only elaborate what is already set out in the first two decads.

BOOK I

First Centum—First Decad

Uyarvu aṟa uyar nalam Uṭaiyavaṉ evaṉ? avaṉ,
Mayarvū aṟa mati-nalam aruḷiṉaṉ evaṉ? avaṉ,
Ayarvu aṟum amararkaḷ atipati evaṉ? avaṉ
Tuyar aṟu cuṭar-aṭi toḻutu eḻu eṉ maṉaṉē. (I–1–1)

Translation

My mind, lift yourself up to the dazzling, *distress-dispelling* feet of the One, who is the Lord of the ever alert *Eternal Heroes*, who is the natural repository of super-excellent traits which cut out all fatigue, and who unto me vouchsafed *wisdom-love*, ridding me of *ignorance*, leaving no trace of it behind.

Notes

(i) *Distress-dispelling feet*: Tradition has it that this has a pointed reference to the comely feet of Lord Devarāja, enshrined in Śrī Hasti Śailam (Kāñcīpuram). Whereas all the other Ācāryas before Śrī Rāmānuja interpreted this phrase as "The feet that relieve the distress of the yearning votaries", Śrī Rāmānuja held that the Lord's feet relieve His own erstwhile distress over the sad plight of His subjects, sunk deep in the miserable mire of 'Samsāra', the dreadful cycle of birth and death, after relieving the distress of the latter.

(ii) *Eternal Heroes*: The 'Nitya Sūrīs', Ananta, Garuḍa, Viṣvaksena and other celestials, ever alert in the Lord's intimate service in Yonder Heavens, and ever free, in the sense that they never passed through the gruelling mill of 'Samsāra' the cycle of birth and death.

(iii) '*Matinalam*' in the original text means 'wisdom-love' which can be expanded as follows:

(*a*) God granted me 'wisdom' as well as 'love'.*

*Bhakti rūpāpanna Jñāna or intellectual love of God.

(*b*) The second interpretation ascribed to Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar is: "God gave me loving wisdom or wisdom partaking of the nature of love to God, vigorous from the very root like the '*Karuṅkāli*' (a heavy wood-*Acasia catechu*). Whereas, in the case of others, love of God is a growth from acts of virtue, in the case of the Āḷvārs, such love was induced in them by God's spontaneous grace, and love to God, in this context, is none other than the heart and mind, perfectly blended and attuned to the loving service of God.

(*c*) Queried whether Nammāḷvār was one characterised by love to God (bhakti) or characterised by surrender to the will of God (prapatti), the great preceptor, Empār, replied that the saint had surrendered his will entirely to God and that love to God, in his case, was merely a habit by which he sustained himself, very different from the generality of us, who, while ostensibly resigned to His will, seek employment, too, for obtaining food, etc. In the Saint's case, Lord Kṛṣṇa was unto him everything—food, drink and every other luxury.

(iv) *Rid of ignorance*: Clear-cut knowledge, absolutely free from non-apprehension (*ajñāna*) or the error of mistaking the body for the soul, wrong apprehension (*anyatha-jñāna*) or the error of owing allegiance to other than the Supreme Lord (minor deities) and '*viparīta-jñāna*' (mis-apprehension or inverted apprehension), the error of thinking that the individual soul is the independent master and can enjoy itself (like the *kaivalya* class) whereas it is the sole servitor of the Lord, in whom vests the inviolable right to enjoy the former—such blemishless knowledge was dowered on the saint by the Lord's free Grace—an act of Grace galore!

Maṉaṉ-akam malam aṟa malarmicai eḻutarum
Maṉaṉ-uṇarvu aḷavu ilaṉ, poṟi-uṇarvuavai ilaṉ,
Iṉaṉ uṇar, muḻu nalam, etir nikaḻ kaḻiviṉum
Iṉaṉ ilaṉ, eṉaṉ uyir, mikunarai ilaṉē. **(I–1–2)**

Translation

The Supreme Lord, peerless at all times, past, present and future, the embodiment of bliss and knowledge in their perfection, much beyond the grasp of the senses, outside the ken of comprehension of even the thoroughly cleansed mind of the Yogi, He is my good soul. O my mind, lift yourself up to the dazzling, distress-dispelling feet of such a Great One.

Notes

(i) In the first stanza, it was said that there was none above the Lord. The doubt might, however, arise whether He has any equal and now it is declared that He has no equal either.

(ii) It might sound strange that the Lord is beyond the comprehension of even the 'Yogi', with a thoroughly cleansed mind; the fact is, even he can comprehend Him only as infinite and immeasurable, free from the limiting adjuncts of the other two entities (Tattvas), namely, 'Jīva' (individual soul or 'cit', that which perceives) and matter ('acit', that which does not perceive).

Ilaṉ atu, uṭaiyaṉ itu: eṉa niṉaivu ariyavaṉ;
Nilaṉiṭai vicumpiṭai uruviṉaṉ, aruviṉaṉ;
Pulaṉoṭu pulaṉ alaṉ, oḻivu ilaṉ; paranta aṉ
Nalaṉ uṭai oruvaṉai naṇukiṉam nāmē. **(I–1–3)**

Translation

Could He be said to possess that one and not this other thing? No, He pervades, without intermission, the entire Universe, the region high up as well as those below the earth at all times; He abides in all non-sentient things (matter), having form and size as well as the formless sentient beings within them all (individual

souls), and He is yet beyond the grasp of the senses. Blessed are we to have attained Him of peerless glory!

Notes

(i) The Lord was revealed in the first stanza, in His transcendental glory in the High Heavens and He is now described as the all-pervasive Internal Controller, dwelling in the heart of every one, even on this side of heaven, the land of dark nescience, for the sustenance of His '*līlā-vibhūti*' or the sportive universe.

(ii) Notwithstanding the king's sovereignty over the entire land, he and his royal consorts lovingly raise orchards and flower gardens as a matter of recreation, and tend them with special care. The sportive universe (*līlā vibhūti*) is a similar creation of the Lord, raised and retained at His volition.

Nām avaṉ ivaṉ uvaṉ, avaḷ ivaḷ uvaḷ evaḷ,
Tām avar ivar uvar, atu itu utu etu,
Vīm avai ivai uvai, avai nalam, tīṅku avai,
Ām avai, āyavai, āyniṉṟa avarē. (I–1–4)

Translation

We, the masculine beings over here, as well as those at a distance, near at hand and in between, the feminine species similarly situated, all things collectively seen here, there and everywhere, what can be individually pointed out as this, that and the other, the non-sentient things, good, bad, perishable and imperishable, things that were, are and will be, all these subsist in Him. (In other words, all these are sustained, directed and controlled by him).

Avaravar tamatamatu aṟivu aṟi vakaivakai
Avaravar iṟaiyavar eṉa aṭi aṭaivarkaḷ;
Avaravar iṟaiyavar kuṟaivu ilar; Iṟaiyavar
Avaravar vitivaḻi aṭaiya niṉṟaṉarē. (I–1–5)

Translation

Different grades of people, with varying degrees of spiritual knowledge and calibre, seek favours from minor deities (*Agni*, *Indra* etc.) whom they propitiate as their God. If those deities, in turn, bestow the boons sought by their votaries, to the extent deserved by them, it is *only through the grace of the Supreme Lord*, (*Śrīman Nārāyaṇa*) who stays inside these deities (as their internal *controller*) and maintains them.

Notes

(i) The śāstras proclaim that the Supreme Lord (puruṣōttama) alone is the granter of all felicities and destroyer of all evils.*

(ii) But for the influx of the requisite power from the Supreme Lord, which maintains the minor deities in their respective positions of authority, the minor deities, by themselves, would be incapable of extending favours to their votaries and vouch-safing protection to them; if they did, all by themselves, it would indeed be just as miraculous as the earthen elephants and horses, stationed in battle array, in the precincts of the petty pagodas of demi-gods (*Śāsthā*), on the outskirts of villages and towns, actually going to battle—a veritable impossibility!

Niṉṟaṉar iruntaṉar kiṭantaṉar tirintaṉar,
Niṉṟilar iruntilar kiṭantilar tirintilar,
Eṉṟum ōr iyalviṉar eṉa niṉaivu ariyavar;
Eṉṟum ōr iyalvoṭu niṉṟa em tiṭarē. (I–1–6)

Translation

We have it on the firm authority of the Vedās, that it is our Supreme Lord, who controls and sustains the different postures of standing, sitting, lying and wandering about, of one and all, as well as their abstinance therefrom, Himself being immutable (undergoing no change whatsoever) and yet beyond specific scrutiny and comprehension.

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* "Na sampadam samāhare vibhatām vinivartane, samartho dhriśyate Kaścit tam vinā Puruottamaṁ."

Notes

(i) In stanzas 4 and 5, the Supreme Lord was shown to be the Sole Architect and Sustainer of the created world of differences (*līla vibhūti*) and now, in this stanza, He is declared to be the cause of motion as well as rest- '*pravṛtti*' as well as '*nivṛtti*'.

(ii) To a poser whether God, on Whom all our actions or motions are said to be dependent, is again required to bring our activity to rest, Empār replied in the affirmative and brought home the point by citing the example of sage Viśvāmitra, who had pushed King 'Triśaṅku', bodily, on to *Svarga*, arresting his fall therefrom and making him stay mid-way in the process.

Tiṭa vicumpu, eri, vaḷi nīr, nilam ivaimicaip
Paṭar poruḷ muḻuvatum āy, avai avaitoṟum
Uṭal micai uyir eṉak karantu, eṅkum parantuḷaṉ:
Cuṭar miku curutiyuḷ ivai uṇṭa curaṉē. (I–1–7)

Translation

The Supreme Lord, enshrined in the shining śruti (scriptures-Vedās) is the Material cause of the basic elements of '*ākāśa*' (ether), air, fire, water and earth, which combined to usher in the worlds, with a vast variety of colours and forms; He pervades them all, in and out, like unto the soul inside the body and remains invisible; He contains them all inside His stomach (during the period of deluge).

Note

The preceding stanzas, which declare that God is all-in-all, might smack of monistic philosophy, making it out that God is the one and only entity from whom all things emanated, which are thus merely His manifestations. Now it is clarified that the Lord is apart from the non-sentient things and sentient beings and enters them all as 'Antaryāmin' (Internal Controller), like unto the soul inside the body, an enunciation based on no less than the authority of the scintillating Vedās. (*Herein lies the key to the Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy*).

Curar aṟivu-aru nilai viṇ mutal muḻuvatum
Varaṉ mutalāy, avai muḻutu uṇṭa paraparaṉ
Puram oru mūṉṟu erittu, amararkkum aṟiviyantu,
Araṉ ayaṉ eṉa, ulaku aḻittu amaittu uḷaṉē. (I–1–8)

Translation

The Supreme Lord is beyond the comprehension of even Brahmā and other *Curar* (Devas); He is the material cause of the primordial matter, the other elements and all that exist, and safeguards them all inside His Stomach during the period of deluge; He is the one who (functioning through Śiva) destroyed the three unique flying citadels. He is the propagator of knowledge to the *Amarar* (Devas) through Brahmā; He creates the worlds and dissolves them through *Ayaṉ* (*Brahmā*) and *Araṉ* (*Śiva*) standing within them (as their Inner Self).

Note

It has been made out in the preceding stanzas that (1) Lord Mahāviṣṇu is the Supreme Lord, proclaimed, as such, by the Vedās and (2) He is the Soul of all that exist, controls their creation, sustentation and dissolution. All these might appear to be one-sided, displaying a marked partiality for Mahāviṣṇu, ignoring the claims of the Stalwārts like Brahmā, Rudra and other powerful Devas, who have to their credit several achievements, such as creation of the worlds and dissolution thereof, destruction of the flying citadels of the three tough demons, etc. By way of dispelling the superficial belief and knowledge that Mahāviṣṇu is but a co-functionary, on a par with Brahmā and Rudra, that Mahāviṣṇu has the limited function of sustentation only, while the other two are the sole monarchs of their respective fields of creation and dissolution, it is now stated that all the three functions vest in Mahāviṣṇu alone, who gets them discharged through the appropriate authority. Śvetāśvatāropaniṣad clarifies that Brahmā emerged from the lotus flower that blossomed on the stalk sprouting from

Mahāviṣṇu's navel and was imparted by Him, the requisite knowledge of the Vēdās to carry on the work of creation and disseminate the Vēdās to others. As regards the function of dissolution, Rudra and Yama have their own limitations which Mahāviṣṇu transcends as their Inner Self, sustaining, directing and controlling them all.

Uḷaṉ eṉil uḷaṉ, avaṉ uruvam iv uruvukaḷ;
Uḷaṉ alaṉ eṉil, avaṉ aruvam iv aruvukaḷ;
Uḷaṉ eṉa, ilaṉ eṉa, ivai kuṇam uṭaimaiyil,
Uḷaṉ iru takaimaiyoṭu, oḻivu ilaṉ parantē. (I–1–9)

Translation

Be it said (as *the theists say*), " He is," or (as the *atheists say*) "He is not", (both ways) His existence is established. He exists, at all times and in all places together with the aggregate of the formless sentient beings and the non-sentient things with shape and size, both in the gross state (embodied and therefore visible) and in the subtle state (disembodied and therefore objectively imperceptible).

Notes

(i) The theists (Vaidikas) are those who subscribe to the authority of the Vēdās;

(ii) The atheists (Nāstikas) are those who deny the existence of God. Denial can and ought to be only with respect to a thing, which forms the subject of such denial. That thing should be there, at least notionally, as ' nothing ', as such, does not warrant denial, rather needs no denial. Thus, this stanza cuts across the exponents of ' Śunya Vāda ' or the doctrine of nothingness. The Upaniṣadic text ' *asat* vâ idamagra āsīth ' refers to the invisible subtle state (too subtle to be visible), when this world which forms Brahman's body was gradually reabsorbed into Brahman, each constituent element being refunded into its immediate cause. The word 'asat' italicized in the text, does not connote a state of nothingness or non-existence but the ' subtle ' state as distinguished from the gross or visible, manifest state.

Paranta taṇ paravaiyuḷ nīrtoṟum parantuḷaṉ
Paranta aṇṭam itu eṉa: nilam vicumpu oḻivu aṟak
Karanta cil iṭantoṟum iṭam tikaḻ poruḷtoṟum
Karantu, eṅkum parantuḷaṉ; ivai uṇṭa karaṉē. (I–1–10)

Translation

The Lord pervades every little bit of the oceanic waters, cool and sprawling (and yet does not feel cramped but, on the other hand), He feels as easy there as in the expansive world outside. Either on earth or the upper regions (in the whole universe) there is no place where He is not immanent, dwelling, as He does secretly, in the heart of all things and being however minute, and in all places (imperceptible to the things and beings pervaded by Him ever firm and eternal). He is the Lord, who contains them all within Himself, during the period of deluge (in the state of dissolution).

Notes

(i) The Individual Soul, of the size of a minute speck, pervades the body it gets into, only by dint of its attributive consciousness; in the very nature of things, it cannot be co-extensive and co-expansive with the body it occupies, like God, who is omnipresent, not being conditioned by any limiting adjuncts of the other two entities, namely, spirit (Jīva) and matter.

(ii) The doubt as to how the Lord can pervade the inside out of the Individual Soul, of the size of a mere speck (sub-atomic) gets automatically resolved, seeing that the Lord, in but a juvenile form, contains all the worlds during the period of deluge—if the golden stomach, which devoured all the butter stored up by the damsels in the pastoral village of Gokul, could contain within it all the worlds as well, why should one doubt the Lord's power of pervasion of the minutest of things, both in and out?

Kara vicumpu, eri, vaḷi, nīr, nilam: ivaimicai
Varaṉ-navil, tiṟal, vali, aḷi, poṟai āyniṉṟa
Paraṉ aṭimēl kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col
Niral-niṟai āyirattu ivai pattum vīṭē. (I–1–11)

Translation

The foregoing ten stanzas, out of the thousand, rich alike in sound and substance (matter and manner of expression), sung by Caṭakōpaṉ of Kurukūr, in adoration of the Glorious Feet of the Supreme Lord, the great Contriver and Controller of the five elements, the spatial ether, air, fire, water and earth, with their respective basic qualities of sound, force, heat, chillness and endurance, shall lead (the chanters on) to 'Mōkṣa' (final emancipation from the bondage of 'Saṃsāra', the terrific cycle of birth and death).

Notes

(i) This sets the pattern of the entire work, the last stanza of each decad indicating the benefits accruing to one who chants the songs in the decad and/or learns the meanings thereof. One might wonder how the Saint could refer to the size of the work, as comprising thousand stanzas right at the start. Well, there are two ways of looking at it, namely,

(*a*) as one whose knowledge was fully inspired by God, he knew that he would reel off a thousand stanzas; and

(*b*) the poet could not sustain himself except by singing a thousand songs in adoration of the Lord, and thus it was a matter already contemplated by him, a resolution, as it were, to sing as many songs.

(ii) Summing up, in this stanza, the decad as a whole, the Saint has made it abundantly clear that our salvation lies in seeking refuge at the Lord's Feet, the path of loving surrender to God being the central theme of the whole work, otherwise known as '*Dīrgha Śaraṇāgati*'. Actually, the first decad is the epitome of the entire hymnal, even as the first three stanzas of this decad sum up the topic of the whole decad while the first stanza is the quintessence of the first three stanzas and the opening line of the first stanza, the brilliant summary thereof.

First Centum Second Decad (I-2)
(Viṭumiṉ muṟṟavum)

Preamble

The transcendental glory of the Supreme Lord, His Supremacy as the material cause as well as the efficient cause and final cause of all life and being, the fact of His being the one and only Giver, either directly or through other minor deities, whose favours their respective votaries seek, His lustrous Feet being the sure and certain means of salvation for one and all, all these having been revealed to the Saint by the Lord Himself, the Saint revelled in this blissful knowledge, in the preceding Tiruvāymoḷi. Far from being selfish and self-centred, he wanted to share all this knowledge with his fellow beings, as a matter of mutual joy and enlightenment. But, alas! he found them all steeped in worldly life, just the very reverse of what he was. And yet, He would not lose heart. Banking on their inherent capacity to discriminate between good and bad things, he now exhorts them to give up the elusive and obnoxious pleasures of worldly life, disengage themselves from the erroneous notions of 'I' and 'Mine' and dedicate themselves to the apprehension of the limitless wealth and splendour of the Supreme Lord and reap the rich harvest of eternal bliss and beatitude. In this decad, the Āḷvār also teaches that true renunciation is of the mind, as distinguished from mere bodily displacements, such as fleeing away from the haunts of men and living a secluded life in a forest. No place is safe and impregnable to the invasion of temptations which could molest the mind, as seen from the examples of Ādi-Bharatā (Jaḍa-Bharatā) and Śoubhari. The Āḷvār exhorts, in the third stanza of this decad, as follows:

"Pluck out the disease of 'I-ness' and 'My-ness',
right from the roots and join the Lord".

Renunciation, therefore, lies in disengaging one's mind from the erroneous notions of 'I' and 'Mine' and surrendering oneself, *in toto*, to the will of God. Examples of such mental renunciation are found in King Janaka and Saint Kulacēkara. Did not the former say, unaffected by the illusory fire inducted by Sage Śuka, "Mithilāyāṁ pradagdhāyāṁ na me kiñcitpradahyate?"*

*** If Mithilā is burnt, it is Mithila burnt; what is it to me"**

Kulacēkara Āḻvār sang, in his ' Perumāḷ Tirumoḻi, IV decad:

Stanza 5:

" This realm, with all its wealth, I abjure,
Riding the elephant in rut, frightful to behold;
The blessing of being a shrub, I implore,
At lovely Tiruvēṅkaṭam, abode of my Liege, Lord ".

Stanza 7:

" Little do I value being a King of Kings,
all that name and fame,
Holding sway under a single parasol,
white as the full moon;
Instead, ' tis my earnest will that I should,
as a jungle stream,
Course through Tirumalai, with its honey-
studded flower gardens ".

**Vīṭumiṉ muṟṟavum; vīṭu ceytu, um uyir
Vīṭu uṭaiyāṉiṭai vīṭu ceymmiṉē. (I–2–1)**

Translation

Give up, *in toto*, [all that militates against holding a rapport with God] and giving up thus, surrender yourself unto (Him) the Custodian [the great Ordainer and Granter] of Heaven.

Notes

(i) Śrīman Nārāyaṇa is the Granter of Heaven, and yet the Āḻvār has not straightaway revealed that Holy Name, just to set the mind (of the listener) on to enquire, that is, stimulate spiritual investigation. Actually, the revelation comes in the tenth stanza.

(ii) What is emphasised in this stanza is the sacrifice of the worldly appetites to the surpassing love and beauty of God, the supreme preference to God, as against the adulteration of the senses towards earthly disposition.

If giving up has been mentioned first and surrender to the Lord next, one has to appreciate this sequence in the context of a child holding by the hand a live snake, and the elders around crying out: " ***Drop it*** down, ***drop it*** down, it is a snake ! " Another example would be a passer-by, seeing a house on fire, exhorts the inmates of the house, " ***Come out***, ***come out***, your house is on fire ". The emphasis thus rests on that which is to be eschewed, it being obnoxious, the very antithesis of the Lord to whom we owe undivided allegiance.

**Miṉṉiṉ nilai ila maṉ uyir ākkaikaḷ;
Eṉṉum iṭattu, Iṟai uṉṉumiṉ nīrē. (I–2–2)**

Translation

You will do well to pause for a while and discover for your selves that the bodies the souls get into [and look upon as the media for the enjoyment of sensual pleasures] last no more than the (fleeting) lightning.

**Nīr numatu eṉṟu ivai vērmutal māyttu, Iṟai
Cērmiṉ; uyirkku atan nēr niṟai Illē. (I–2–3)**

Translation

Cutting out, root and branch, all sense of ' You ' and ' Yours ' join the Lord; there is nothing as good as that for the Souls [there can be no greater felicity than that].

Note

It would indeed be difficult to enumerate the thousand and odd things to be eschewed and discarded. And so, the poet just tackles the root causes of all the evils, which have to be eradicated *in toto*. Instead of wording as ' I ' and ' Mine ', the Āḻvār has cautiously put it in the second person, as ' You ' and ' Yours ', in this stanza, lest the very things he abhors and advises others to eradicate should corrupt him

even at the mere mention thereof, in the first person—the risk of getting his tongue blistered, avoided.

Illatum uḷḷatum allatu avaṉ uru;
Ellai il an nalam: pulku, paṟṟu aṟṟē. (I–2–4)

Translation

Renouncing all else, seek Him (*Īśvara*) of *limitless* bliss, very different from the [seemingly] non-existent [fleeting and ever-changing] material things and the ever-existing (non-changing) sentient beings [with their limiting adjuncts].

Note

An inexhaustible fountain of bliss that the Lord is, one has to attach oneself to such a fountain, only through a complete severance of attachment to the ephemeral and illusory worldly pleasures and distractions, with uncompromising rigidity; hence, this advice of the Āḻvār to the fellow-beings.

Aṟṟatu paṟṟu eṉil, uṟṟatu vīṭu uyir;
Ceṟṟu atu maṉ uṟil, aṟṟu iṟai paṟṟē. (I–2–5)

Translation

Freed from worldly attachments, the Soul attains emancipation [from the erstwhile bondage]; however, shunning that [menacing state of self-enjoyment, known as *kaivalya mokṣa*], seek firmly the [bliss of eternal service to the Supreme] Lord, with exclusive devotion unto Him.

Note

Mere liberation from bondage resulting in a state of the lustrous soul getting lost in self-enjoyment (*kaivalya mokṣa*) is yet another hurdle, very menacing indeed, to be got over. being a serious impediment to the far superior and blissful experience of service unto the Lord on the yonder side of heaven, this '*kaivalya*' state also deserves to be shunned and discarded.

Paṟṟu ilaṉ-īcaṉum, muṟṟavum niṉṟaṉaṉ;
Paṟṟu ilaiyāy, avaṉ muṟṟil aṭaṅkē. (I–2–6)

Translation

Īcaṉ (the Supreme Lord), being solely attached to His devotees, He is All-in-One' (everything) unto them. And so, [ye worldlings]! hold on to Him and get absorbed in serving Him exclusively.

Note

Thinking that the worldlings (whom the Āḻvār addresses) might have their own misgivings about the easy accessibility of the Supreme Lord, Whom they are being asked to court and venerate, the doubt is being cleared in this stanza. Side by side with overlordship there is in Him the astounding quality of amazing simplicity, which predominates and makes it appear that this is His natural trait, and the other quality of Supremacy is super-imposed, rather serving as a foil against which the former shines all the more.

Aṭaṅku eḻil campattu aṭaṅkak kaṇṭu, Īcaṉ
Aṭaṅku eḻil aktu eṉṟu aṭaṅkuka uḷḷē. (I–2–7)

Translation

Realise that all this exceedingly enchanting cosmic wealth, you behold, is that of *Īcaṉ* [and that you are but a part of that]; [with this sense of belonging] it behoves you to blend yourself into it.

Notes

(i) No doubt, it was duly emphasised in the preceding stanzas that the Lord's native simplicity is far more pronounced than His overlordship, might and majesty. But the very thought of His majesty puts us, the insignificant tiny little beings nowhere, just like a bit of straw drifting on the bosom of the mighty ocean, being borne back to the shore by the curling waves. But

all this fear would vanish when we realise that we form part of His possessions and are thus rightfully entitled to approach Him, in love, without fear of such vast distance existing between Him and us, as between the ocean and the straw.

(ii) The miraculous change wrought by this sense of belonging has been happily illustrated by that great Preceptor, Nañcīyar, as follows:

(*a*) A merchant went overseas for trading leaving his wife behind in an advanced state of pregnancy. A son was born to them and grew up nicely. Years rolled on and yet the merchant did not come back home. There was an exhibition in a neighbouring place at which the little boy took up a stall and sold his wares. Just then, the aforesaid merchant also returned from abroad and took up a neighbouring stall. There arose a quarrel, one of those days, over the encroachment of goods in their booths and when it grew violent a passer-by, who knew them both, pointed out that the elderly merchant was quarrelling with his own son. Hostilities ceased immediately and gave place to mutual remorse, with the happy *reunion* of father and son.

(*b*) It was a lovely garden and the Prince had a great mind to enter it. But then, he was afraid of trespassing into somebody's garden and, therefore, stood hesitatingly at the entrance. However, as soon as some one said, " This garden belongs to your father, the King ", all fear vanished and he dashed inside, roamed about and enjoyed to his heart's content. So does our fear to approach the Almighty vanish as soon as we realise that we are His children, the natural objects of His boundless love.

Uḷḷam urai ceyal uḷḷa im mūṉṟaiyum
Uḷḷik keṭuttu, Iṟai-uḷḷil oṭuṅkē. (I–2–8)

Translation

With true awareness that the triple faculties of mental apprehension, speech and bodily actions, already at your command, are meant to be solely dedicated to *Iṟai* (the Lord), place them at His exclusive service, duly divested of all their erstwhile misplaced attachments and inhibitions.

Oṭuṅka avaṉkaṇ, Oṭuṅkalum ellām
Viṭum; piṉṉum, ākkai viṭumpoḻutu eṇṇē. (I–2–9)

Translation

Once you (realise your true relationship with God, He, as the Proprietor and you, as His property and) dedicate yourself to Him (with this awakening), all your sins (which kept you away from Him, so long) will cease; (once the cause ceases, the effect, namely, the body which tethers you will automatically cease) await then, the day when the physical body falls off.

Note

As soon as the body drops off, salvation, sure and certain, waits at the door of one who entrusts oneself to the Lord's keeping, with the spiritual awakening, as above.

Eṇ perukku an nalattu oṇ poruḷ-īṟu ila
Vaṇ pukaḻ Nāraṇaṉ tiṇ kaḻal cērē. (I–2–10)

Translation

Seek ye, the mighty feet (the sure haven of all) of Nāraṇaṉ, who is, at once, the abode of countless souls of vast excellence and an inexhaustible fountain of bliss, the repository of innumerable auspicious attributes.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār concludes this, his first address to the fellow-beings, by teaching them how to pray, that is,

by giving out the substance of the eight-lettered 'Tirumantra', as above.

(ii) Kūrattāḻvāṉ, who was teaching Tiruvāymoḻi to his two sons, Bhaṭṭar and Śrīrāmappiḷḷai, stopped short when he came to this stanza, explanatory of the holy prayer (Tirumantra), which had to be taught by their constituted Guru, Śri Empār, residing in the same street, just a few houses off. Āḻvāṉ ordered the two youngsters to go to their Guru and learn the meaning of this stanza. Just as they were leaving, he called them back, saying:

"Stay! life is precarious and uncertain and one does not know who may live and who may die the next moment. You may, therefore, hear (the esoteric meaning of this verse) from myself." He then proceeded to explain to them the purport of this stanza which has a direct bearing on 'Tirumantra'. This only goes to emphasize that not a moment should be lost in learning the Science that will lead us to God, the more so, when human life is precarious and uncertain.

Cērttaṭat teṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col
Cīrt toṭai āyirattu ōrtta ip pattē. (I–2–11)

Translation

These ten stanzas, out of the thousand, sung in accurate metrical composition, by Caṭakōpaṉ of Tirunakari, with lovely ponds, convey his well-thought-out message (for the uplift and emancipation of mankind).

First Centum—Third Decad (I-3)
(Pattu uṭai Aṭiyavar)

Preamble

In the first decad of this centum, the Āḻvār spoke of the Super-eminent glory of the Lord and, in the very next decad, he exhorted the worldlings to turn their minds God-ward and get absorbed in Him, with whole-hearted devotion. But then, they felt that they

were no better than the man, lame of both hands, being required to mount an elephant. Now, in this decad, the Āḻvār puts them at ease by depicting the disarming simplicity of the Lord, like unto an elephant making itself so pliable as to enable even such a lame man to mount it easily. Speaking about the Supreme Lord's easy accessibility (saulabhya), the Āḻvār at once conjures up the vision of His being tied down to a mere pounder, when He, as Kṛṣṇa, the cowherd boy, got caught in the act of stealing butter—the very antithesis of His transcendent glory as the consort of Śrī Mahā Lakṣmī, residing on His winsome chest. Oh, what a contrast and what an amazing simplicity, which literally struck the poet dumb, nay, sent him into a deep trance, lasting six months! Here is an episode of episodes, melting down the hearts of the true devotees into running rivulets. As Śrī Vedānta Dēśika says, in his rapturous composition 'Yādavābhyudaya', mere contemplation of this episode leads to our release from bondage.

Pattu uṭai aṭiyavarkku eḷiyavaṉ, piṟarkaḷukku ariya
Vittakaṉ, Malarmakaḷ virumpum nam arumpeṟal aṭikaḷ
Mattu uṟu kaṭai veṇṇai kaḷaviṉil uraviṭai yāppuṇṭu
Ettiṟam, uralinōṭu iṇaintiruntu ēṅkiya eḷivē. (I–3–1)

Translation

Those who unto Him turn their minds, in utter devotion, He is easily accessible but is the Mystic, difficult of attainment by others. (Oh, what a wonder, as a mere infant, fondled by Yaśōdā and other damsels of Gōkul, he could vanquish the demoniac *Pūthanā*, *Śakaṭāśura* and a host of others!) Eagerly sought Malarmakaḷ (Śrī *Mahālakṣmī*), who emerged from the soft lotus flower and yet did not take to it kindly but took her abode on the broad and winsome chest of the Lord), what a marvel, our Lord, difficult to attain, was seen reduced to the abject position of a weeping child, fastened by the chest to a pounder (by *Yaśōdā*, as a punishment) for stealing butter off the churning rod-a paragon of simplicity galore!

Note

The Āḻvār is said to have gone into a trance for as many as six months, contemplating the amazing simplicity of the Supreme Lord, as brought out in this stanza.

Eḻivarum iyalviṉaṉ nilai varampu ila pala piṟappāy;
Oḷivarum muḻu nalam mutal ila, Kēṭu ila; vīṭu ām
Teḷitarum nilaimaiyatu oḻivu ilaṉ muḻuvatum; iṟaiyōṉ
Aḷivarum aruḷiṉōṭu akattaṉaṉ, puṟattaṉaṉ amaintē. (I–3–2)

Preamble

Tradition has it that Śrī Matura Kavi and several other savants, who had the great good fortune of listening to 'Tiruvāymoḻi' from the sacred lips of the Āḻvār, gathered round the insensate Āḻvār and eagerly awaited his return to his senses. It was after the lapse of a period of six months, that the Āḻvār recovered himself, took up the thread where he had left it and proceeded to expatiate on the Lord's aforesaid 'Saulabhya' (easy accessibility) by saying that He is simplicity itself (simplicity personified).

Translation

The Lord is the very personification of simplicity, which helps all His numerous auspicious qualities, without beginning or end, shine forth; having made innumerable descents without restriction of manner of birth and place of descent, it is always the Lord's prerogative to grant that cleansed and clarified state (known as '*Mokṣa*'). Shedding, with sweet spontaniety, His unlimited grace unto the devotees (and doing even odd jobs for them) He is beyond the reach of others (the inimical).

Amaivu uṭai aṟaneṟi muḻuvatum uyarvu aṟa uyarntu
Amaivu uṭai mutal keṭal oṭivu iṭai aṟa nilam atuām
Amaivu uṭai amararum, yāvaiyum yāvarum tāṉ ām,
Amaivu uṭai Nāraṇaṉ māyaiyai aṟipavar yārē? (I–3–3)

Translation

Who indeed can comprehend the wonderful secret of the descents (*Avatāras*) of (Lord) Nāraṇaṉ, the appropriate abode of all sentient beings including the 'Amaras' (the exalted Brahmā and other celestials) of outstanding eminence by virtue of their

moral attainments of a high degree and mental perfection, as well as the non-sentient things?

Note

None can indeed comprehend this divine secret, neither the ever-free, eternal angels (*Nitya Sūrīs*) in the yonder Heaven, totally immersed in the enjoyment of the Lord, in that transcendent setting nor the worldlings, engrossed in their pursuit after food and raiment nor even the *Āḻvārs*, although blest by the Lord with perfect knowledge, as they just get entranced by the mere contemplation of the Lord's astounding simplicity and thaw down.

Yārum ōr nilaimaiyaṉ eṉa aṟivu-ariya em perumāṉ,
Yārum ōr nilaimaiyaṉ eṉa aṟivu-eḷiya em perumāṉ,
Pērum ōr āyiram piṟa pala uṭaiya em perumāṉ,
Pērum ōr uruvamum uḷatu illai, ilatu illai piṇakkē. (I–3–4)

Translation

Our Sire, bearing a thousand (innumerable) names and (the) forms (appropriate thereto) can be comprehended, as such, (by the devotees, however meagre, their intelect and poor, their parentage); (on the other hand) the ungodly who bear no love for Him cannot comprehend His names and forms (however exalted be their knowledge and parentage); (And so), there is a perennial debate (between these two sets of people) one group affirming that the Lord goes by several names and forms and the other group asserting that He has none of these.

Piṇakku aṟa aṟu vakaic camayamum neṟi uḷḷi uraitta
Kaṇakku aṟu nalattaṉaṉ; antam il āti am pakavaṉ;
Vaṇakku ūṭait tavaneṟi vaḻi niṉṟu, puṟaneṟi kaḷaikaṭṭu,
Uṇakkumiṉ, pacai aṟa! avanuṭai uṇarvukoṇṭu uṇarntē. (I–3–5)

Translation

The eternal Lord, the lovely Primate possessing the Six principal attributes of *knowledge, strength, sovereignty, valour, power* and *splendour*) has set at naught the *six heretical philosophical doctrines* (*Sāṅkhya, Yōga, Kaṇāta, Bouddha, Jaina* and *Pāśupada*) by

setting forth the cream of the Vedic teachings in His 'Song celestial' (*Gīta*). Imbibing the quintessence of those teachings, stick to the path of loving surrender to His Sweet grace (*Prapatti mārgā*) to the exclusion of all the other paths of discipline, drying up, at the same time, the erstwhile springs of bodily pleasures *in toto* (not merely through non-indulgence in them but through a positive aversion thereto).

Note

As regards the concrete manner of worshipping the Supreme Lord, the Āḷvār, calls upon the fellow beings to tread the path of 'Bhakti' (God-love of melting tenderness of heart) indicated by the Lord Himself in His 'Song Celestial'.

Uṇarntu uṇarntu iḻintu akaṉṟu uyarntu uru viyanta iṉ ṉilaimai
Uṇarntu uṇarntu uṇarilum, iṟainilai uṇarvu aritu uyirkāḷ!
Uṇarntu uṇarntu uraittu uraittu Ari ayaṉ araṉ eṉṉum ivarai
Uṇarntu uṇarntu uraittu uraittu, iṟaiñcumiṉ maṉappaṭṭatu oṉṟē. (I–3–6)

Preamble

Worldlings to the Āḷvār:

"Oh, Saint, to us with limited knowledge, the Trinity, standing in a row, *Brahmā*, *Viṣṇu* and *Rudra*, appear to be all of the same stature. Pray, enlighten us, as to whether it is actually so or one of them is Superior to the other two or there is yet another Power superior to all the three, so that we may worship that Supreme Authority".

The Āḷvār's reply is as in this stanza, vide gist given below:

Translation

"For the *Jīvātmā* (individual Soul, with its innate intelligence and keen perception pervading far and wide), it is possible to know its own inherent nature and quality through a rigorous process of enquiry, intuition and contemplation. But a similar perception by the Individual Soul, of Iṟainilai (the Divine Nature, Īśvara Svarūpa) is hardly possible. (And yet) ye folks, better study intensely and dispassionately (the authoritative texts highlighting) the individual traits and course of conduct of *Ari* (Nārāyaṇa, *Ayaṉ* (Brahmā) and *Araṉ* (Rudra) and (in the process) fix your mind firmly on the one who impresses you as the Supreme Lord and worship Him (by reciting His names and the relative Mantras) with deep devotion. (Such a study will easily reveal that *Nārāyaṇa* is the Supreme, the Internal Controller of all, including *Brahmā* and *Rudra*, that He is wholly '*Sātvik*' while *Brahmā* and *Rudra* have a blend of '*Rājasik*' and '*tāmasik*' traits, He is the great Ordainer and the others are the ordained, so on and so forth).

Oṉṟu eṉap pala eṉa aṟivu-arum vaṭiviṉuḷ niṉṟa
Naṉṟu eḻil Nāraṇaṉ Nāṉmukaṉ araṉ eṉṉum ivarai
Oṉṟa num maṉattu vaittu, uḷḷi, num iru pacai aṟuttu
Naṉṟu eṉa nalam ceyvatu avaṉiṭai nammuṭai nāḷē. (I–3–7)

Translation

May you ponder in your mind, dispassionately, over the relative merits of the Gods. Nāraṇaṉ beaming through His auspicious attributes, firm and fine, Nāṉmukaṉ (the four-headed *Brahmā*) and *Araṉ* (*Rudra*), who look so much alike that it is difficult to comprehend whether they are one or many; may you also investigate (with the help of authoritative texts) and discern that there is but one God (and that is *Nārāyaṇa*, the Super-Soul residing in all, including *Brahmā* and *Rudra*); with this discovery you will do well to give up your allegiance to the other two (Brahmā and *Rudra*) as God and attach yourselves firmly to *Nārāyaṇa* (as the one and only God) during your life-time.

Nāḷum niṉṟu aṭu nama paḻamai am koṭuviṉai uṭaṉē
Māḷum, ōr kuṟaivu illai; maṉaṉ-akam malam aṟak kaḻuvi,
Nāḷum nam tiru uṭai aṭikaḷ-tam nalam-kaḻal vaṇaṅki,
Māḷum ōr iṭattilum vaṇakkoṭu māḷvatu valamē. (I–3–8)

Translation

If we cleanse our minds of the dirt (of misconceived notion of parity among the '*Thiru-Murties*', *Brahmā*, *Viṣṇu* and *Śiva*) through that bleaching agent, called wisdom, and worship daily at the felicitous feet of our Lord, the gracious consort of *Tiru* (*Śrī Mahālakṣmī*), all our past sins which had been tormenting us so far will die out at once, and we will be free from wants of any

kind. (It is never too late to switch on to the Lord thus.) better repose on His lap, even while dying.

Notes

(i) To a question supposed to have been put to the Āḷvār by his interlocutors, whether their accumulated, age-long sins will not operate as a serious impediment to their worshipping the Lord, this stanza provides the answer. No doubt, the Śāstras proclaim.* that one cannot but taste the fruits of one's actions; in other words, the sins can be liquidated only by the compulsory process of undergoing the prescribed sufferings. That is all right, so far as the potentiality of the reactions of one's own past Karma goes. But that can be no bar to the operation of the Lord's mighty grace, full and flooding, washing away all sins the moment one surrenders to Him, in the gracious presence of Mahālakṣmī, the Divine Mother. If past Karma is like the fire that burns out things, the Lord's grace is like the water that puts out fire.

(ii) Again, assuming that the worldlings further pleaded that time has run out already, and they have very little time left in the present span, the Āḷvār says that it is never too late; even if a decrepit old man dies, leaning forward on his stick, the Lord will be gracious enough to take it as an act of obeisance to Him. The Āḷvār stresses that it is better to bow unto Him, at least during the last moments of one's life, unlike Rāvaṇa whose creed was† not to bow unto any one till his death, and even while dying.

Valattaṉaṉ Tiripuram erittavaṉ, iṭamperat tuntit
Talattu eḻu ticaimukaṉ paṭaitta nal ulakamum tāṉum
Pulappaṭa, piṉṉum taṉ ulakattil akattaṉaṉ tāṉē;
Colap pukil, ivai piṉṉum vayiṟṟu uḷa; ivai avaṉ tuyakkē.
(I–3–9)

* ' Nābhuktaṃ Kṣayate Karma '.

† ' Na nameyam tu kasyacit'.

Translation

His (Lord Mahā Viṣṇu's) navel is the seat of *Ticai mukaṉ* (Brahmā), the creator of many a lovely world, while (*Rudra*) the (Ostensible) destroyer of the three (flying) citadels (and their demoniac chiefs) propitiates the Lord and gets allotted some space to the right, on His (the Lord's) broad, winsome chest (as a place of shelter, in any emergency). He (The Lord) also makes Himself visible to one and all, in the respective worlds (during His *Avatāras*).

In a manner of talking, these (great qualities of the Lord are innumerable, but) are kept in His stomach (undisclosed, far outnumbering those disclosed to us already); these are His enigmatic ways indeed.

Tuyakku aṟu matiyil nal ñāṉattuḷ amararait tuyakkum
Mayakku uṭai māyaikaḷ vāṉilum periyaṉa vallaṉ;
Puyal-karu niṟattaṉaṉ; peru nilaṅ kaṭanta nal aṭip pōtu
Ayarppilaṉ alaṟṟuvaṉ, taḻuvuvaṉ vaṇaṅkuvaṉ amarntē.
(I–3–10)

Translation

If aberrations are noticeable (now and then) in the mental attitudes of even those Amarars (*Celestials*) noted for clarity of knowledge and understanding) (like *Indra* and the 'Nitya Sūris', the ever free angels like *Garuḍa*), towards the supreme Lord, that is because the wonders (of His incarnation) exceed the bounds of the expansive sky and thus (easily) baffle them all. (Be that, as it may) I (on my part) shall unremittingly bow before the lovely feet of the cloud-hued Lord, which spanned the entire universe, embrace and extol them, with a mind wholly detached from all else.

Notes

(i) Speaking about the mental aberrations of even those exalted personages, here are two typical anecdotes: There was a time when the Devas were uprooted from their homes and their women folks were kidnapped by the Asuras. During His Avatāra, as Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Lord fought out the demons and restored the home and hearth to the Devas. While returning from that expedition, Śrī Kṛṣṇa took with Him a flower plant,

plucked out from Indra's garden, to be planted in His palace down below. The ungrateful Indra would, however, not tolerate it and, armed with his mace, he went in hot pursuit of the Lord to snatch the plant from Him.

(ii) And then, during the same Kṛṣṇāvatāra, Garuḍā came down to Earth in pursuit of a snake which, however, sought asylum in Lord Kṛṣṇa. Naturally, the Lord refused to release the snake when demanded by *Garuḍā*, and the latter made no secret of his resentment and uttered such harsh words as: "Is this the reward for my having carried you and your consorts on my shoulders all these years?"

Amararkaḷ toḷutu eḻa alai kaṭal kataintavaṉ-taṉṉai
Amar poḻil vaḷaṅ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ kuṟṟēvalkaḷ
Amar cuvai āyirattu, avaṟṟinuḷ ivai pattum vallār
Amararōṭu uyarvil-ceṉṟu aṟuvar tam piṟavi am ciṟaiyē.
(I–3–11)

Translation

Those that are conversant with these ten songs, out of the thousand sung sweetly, as a piece of Divine Service, by Caṭakōpaṉ of Kurukūr, rich and resourceful, in adoration of the one (Supreme Lord) that churned the milk-ocean with its surging waves, exciting the warm admiration and deep reverence of the (otherwise self-centred) *Amarars* (*Devas*) will get released from the firm and formidable grip of (the cycle of) births and join the holy band of the *Amarars* (the celestials) in the High Heavens.

First Centum—Fourth Decad (I-4)
(Am ciṟaiya maṭa nārāy)

Preamble

The Sublime and the Sensual have always co-existed in both the worlds-the mundane and the spiritual. There is, however, a fundamental difference in their inter-relationship, in the respective spheres. In the material world, the two are mutually exclusive, being diametrically opposed to each other. In the spiritual world, that which, in the language of aesthetics, is termed as '*Śṛṅgār*', is nothing but the psychological imperative for man's consciousness moving towards Him (Super-Soul) of ravishing beauty (as *Bhāgavatā* bears out), just the very inversion of the skin-deep, carnal variety of lust, stamping out the human lover-beloved union. If the love-smitten Parāṅkuśa (Nammāḻvār, who was like unto a goad wearing round his spiritual antagonists through his scintillating hymns and making the Lord Himself pliable, enraptured by his sweet, love-laden hymns) turns out to be a female, expressing herself now as Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī (God-lover), then as the Mother, the intuitive gnostic friend of the love-lorn daughter trying to keep the latter under sobering restraint and sometimes as the soothing Mate, it is but the natural corollary to his boundless love for God and the deep yearning, beyond words, for the Divine presence and lasting union. Actually, the Lord is the only Male or Husband (*Loka bhartā*), the '*Puruṣottama*' the *Kṣetrajña*' and all the Individual souls are but marks of the feminine, the *Kṣetras*' (Location), the female centres of the creative activity of God. It is indeed quite some consolation that the lover-beloved theme is familiar ground for the worldlings and now, without adopting the austere Vedic approach, the Āḻvār would only want them to shift the base and turn the whole drama God-ward and be wholly absorbed in '*Daiva Rasa*' (spiritual love), the '*Brahmānubhava*'. Even as the female anatomy plays a key role in the earthly variety of love, in the spiritual world, '*Para Bhakti*', '*Para Jñāna*' and '*Parama Bhakti*', in the ascending scale of God-love, too deep for words, symbolise the breast of the God-lover, swelling up with God-love.

Songs attributed to the Mother and the Mate are all sung by the Āḻvār only. The Mate is the cementing force joining the lover and the Beloved; this Mate is only symbolic of the sense of fusion and belonging, the inalienable relationship of Master and Servant, between God and Man, inculcated by "*Praṇava*' (*Aum*) in '*Tirumantra*'. The Mother plays the role of '*Namaḥ*' in the said *Mantra* which puts an embargo on the Individual soul indulging in egoistic self-effort to attain God-head, instead of awaiting the descent of His grace. Thus, she prevents the love-intoxicated Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī from trespassing, that is, breaking all norms of correct feminine conduct, and keeps her under restraint. In this

decad, where the Āḻvār is seen transformed as 'Nāyakī' (female lover), some birds are sent by her as emissaries to the Lord. This is the first of the four decads in the whole work, where messages are sent by the Āḻvār to the Lord, the other three being VI-1, VI-8 and IX-7. The winged birds typify the efficient preceptors possessed of the mighty wings, a happy blending of knowledge and conduct. This technique of the Āḻvār has been adopted by the subsequent poets as well. C. F. Kālidāsa's '*Meghadūta*' and Vedānta Deśika's '*Haṁsa Sandeśa*'. Parāśara Bhaṭṭar would exclaim: "The monkeys shot into fame with the advent of Śrī Rāma who employed Hanumān as His chosen emissary to Rāvaṇa's court; likewise the Āḻvārs have made the winged birds famous by commissioning them to carry messages to their Beloved God".

The messages in the four decads, referred to above, were all despatched by the Āḻvār to the Lord but to different destinations, namely, (1) *Vyūha* or the milk-ocean, the seat of the Lord's creative activity, (ii) the *Vibhava* or the Lord's incarnate forms, (iii) '*Paratva*' (transcendent) and '*Antaryāmi*' (Internal Controller of all) and (iv) *Arcā* (Iconic manifestaion), in the chronological order. The Āḻvār is now in the same plight as Śakuntalā, left behind in the hermitage, after her initial meeting and union with King Duṣyanta and hence the necessity for this message invoking the Lord's special trait of forgiveness, by way of overlooking the drawbacks noticed by the Lord in the Āḻvār during their erstwhile union.

And to end this preamble precisely as it was begun, here is an interesting anecdote. When the great Preceptor, Nañcīyar was discoursing on this Tiruvāymoḷi, one of his listeners abruptly left the place, murmuring that the discourse had assumed the complexion of a sensualist's love-conversation. In the first three decads, the saint had expounded Divinity as the Exalted, the worship-worthy and the Easily-accessible. The listener in question appreciated these and observed: "Here is a grand theme, worthy of acceptance by the world-weary, and so long as it treats of the Almighty in His sublime character I am bound to listen to it, as a sensible man ought to". But, as soon as the Saint changed the Divine discourse into the form of love to God, love treated by analogies taken from the experience of mankind in this world, specially in its relation as Lover and the Beloved, Mistress and Spouse and so on, the disciple turned away from it, thinking that this kind of treatment

was a shock to good taste, outrage to his wisdom and a violence to his commonsense. Nañcīyar couldn't but deplore the failure of this unfortunate listener to see, in it, the explanation of the mysterious Divine Love (Bhakti), contained in the Commandment of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka upaniṣad* (*Maitreyi Brāhmaṇa*, 44) to the effect that the Lord is to be lovingly, intensely meditated upon.

First Centum—Fourth Decad (I-4)

Am ciṟaiya maṭa nārāy! aḷiyattāy! nīyum niṉ
Am ciṟaiya cēvalumāy āā eṉṟu eṉakku aruḷi,
Vem ciṟaip puḷ uyarttārkku eṉ viṭū-tūtāyc ceṉṟakkāl,
Vaṉ ciṟaiyil avaṉ vaikkil, vaippuṇṭāl eṉ ceyumō? (I–4–1)

Translation

Ye young, sympathetic Stork, with pretty plumes, taking pity on poor me, go with your male partner and deliver my message to the Lord on whose banner Is (Garuḍa) that bird with formidable plumes; If perchance He puts you in prison tough, what does it matter if you were to suffer on my behalf?

Notes

(i) The white wading birds, stork, crane and heron employed by the Āḻvār as emissaries to God, signify the preceptors, absolutely pure, in and out, standing four-square against the temptations of worldly life, just like these birds with tremendous staying powers, taking up firm positions in the watersheds, coolly resisting the onslaught of the waves.*

(ii) It may be noted that the help of the male stork is solicited through the female, following the imperative need for seeking the Lord through the good offices of the Divine Mother, the grand Intercessor between God and man.

(iii) Putting the birds in prison should not be taken literally and, in fact, it is most unlikely that the Lord would ever

*** Aphorism 154, Ācārya hṛdayam.**

do so. It would indeed be worse than putting them in the toughest prison if He just remained cold and indifferent and would not even look at them, an experience comparable with that of the Princes not getting fed when hunger pinches them.

Eṉ ceyya tāmaraikkaṇ-perumāṉārkku eṉ tūtāy
Eṉ ceyyum uraittakkāl? iṉak kuyilkāḷ! nīr alirē?
Muṉ ceyta muḻuviṉaiyāl tiruvaṭikkīḻk kuṟṟēval
Muṉ ceyya muyalātēṉ akalvatuvō? vitiyiṉamē. (I–4–2)

Preamble

The love-intoxicated Āḻvār beckoned the stork pair, in the preceding stanza, to carry a message to the Lord but the contents of the message are now revealed by him to a band of Kōels. This kind of confusion only reveals the intensity of the Āḻvār's God-love, the ecstatic imbalance of mind.

Translation

Oh, ye happy band of Kōels, what will unto ye happen If you conveyed my message to my lotus-eyed Lord? Well, aren't you the familiar lot? should it be decreed That I, who, from His service, did all these days abstain because of my past sins, be still kept away from His feet?

Notes

(i) There are many points of comparison between the Kōels and the Ācāryas (preceptors).*

(ii) Here is an interesting anecdote to drive home the point that our accumulated sins cannot be washed off by our own efforts and that it is only the Lord's spontaneous grace that can cut the gordian knot and absolve us. Kōḷari Āḻvāṉ and Teṟkāḻvāṉ, two residents of the famous pilgrim centre, Tirukkōṭṭiyūr, in the South, met on an auspicious day, at a bathing ghat. The former demanded of the latter to wash off his sins by taking a dip in the

* See aphorism 153 of Ācārya Hṛdayam, wherein other birds such as parrots, peacocks have also been brought in.

sacred tank. Sharp came the rejoinder from the latter: " Think not, friend, that mv sins will be washed merely by dipping in these waters once or twice. Unless the grace of Lord Saumya Nārāyaṇa (the presiding Deity of the place) descends on me and the discus in His hand destroys all my sins, all my personal exertions will be of no avail." Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, who happened to overhear the conversation was thence forward well impressed with Teṟkāḻvāṉ about whom he had no high opinion before, on a mere superficial estimate.

Vitiyiṉāl peṭai maṇakkum meṉ-nataiya aṉṉaṅkāḷ!
Matiyiṉāl Kuṟaḷ māṇāy ulaku iranta kaḷvarkku,
Matiyilēṉ val-viṉaiyē māḷātō? eṉṟu orutti
Mati ellām uḷ kalaṅki, mayaṅkumāl eṉṉīrē. (I–4–3)

Translation

You lucky pair of swans, with gentle gait, go and tell Him who, as the midget (Vāmaṇa), covertly got a donation of the worlds, that here lies one, whose sins are inexhaustible, in a terrible state of mental imbalance.

Notes

(i) *Lucky pair of swans or lucky Āḻvār?*

It is not so much the felicity of the swans that they remain duly mated, enjoying conjugal bliss, as the luck of the Āḻvār himself. But for their lucky state of existence they would not have been available now for employment by the Āḻvār. Although Śrī Rāma was bemoaning his separation from Sītā, he felt greatly relieved after he got Sugrīva restored to his wife and Kingdom. Even so, the Āḻvār deems himself lucky to see the swans in a happy state.

(ii) The swans are briefed by the Āḻvār to tell the Lord that the sins of the Āḻvār are inexhaustible and that His redemptive grace alone can deliver the goods, in case the Lord insisted that the Āḻvār should first liquidate his sins and then only join Him.

(iii) *Third line*: '*here lies one*': It is hardly necessary to disclose the name of this one by way of identification for the Lord jolly well knew His victim as none other than poor Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, reduced to this critical state by their erstwhile union—

En̲ nīrmai kaṇṭu iraṅki, itu takātu en̲n̲āta
En̲ nīla mukil vaṇṇar̲ku en̲ colli yān̲ collukēn̲ō?
Nan̲-nīrmai in̲i avarkaṇ taṅkātu en̲r̲u oru vāyccol
Nan̲-nīla makan̲r̲ilkāḷ! nalkutirō? nalkīrō? (I–4–4)

Preamble

Seeing that Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī was commissioning several birds, a few blue-tinted An̲r̲il (Cakravāka) birds approached her, as if to enquire whether they could also be of service to her. But the dejected lover that she was, she was struck down by the futility of sending a message to the Lord who remained aloof despite an intimate knowledge of her plight, her inordinate love for Him, during their erstwhile union and failed to see the injustice of the present separation. And yet, she asked the blue birds to apprise her blue-hued Lord of her precarious condition, with little or no chance of survival.

Translation

Ye An̲r̲il birds of sapphire hue!
Tell Him I am about to die, will you?
What have I to tell my cloud-hued Lord,
Who relents not, having seen how I fared
(During our union), and sees not, on his part
'Tis most unjust, from me to depart?

Note

When Sri Parāśara Bhaṭṭar was discoursing on this song, a Tamil Scholar contended that the expression, "having seen my plight", in the first line (original text) should be 'having heard of my plight'. His doubt was how, when they had already been locked in the joy of union, could God, one of the pair, see the signs of pain of the other, after separation. To this, Bhaṭṭar replied: "Don't you know what the Tamil Savant Tiruvaḷḷuvar has said? The lady-love lay in tight embrace with her lover but, now and then, they got a little unlocked while turning on their sides; this slight distance between them was enough to make her lose the colour on her skin, a decolouration resulting from the gloom of separation! Again, in the poems of '*Kur̲untokai*' it has been said, where-ever, wherever the lover touched, there, there, a flush of colour arose; wherever, wherever the touch had ceased, there, there, the colour sank. The scholar could at once realise that the message in question only reminds the Lord of what He had Himself noticed during His erstwhile union with Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī.

Nalkit tān̲ kāttu aḷikkum poḻil ēḻum; vin̲aiyēr̲kē
Nalkat tān̲ ākātō? Nāraṇan̲aik kaṇṭakkāl,
Malku nīrp pun̲al-paṭappai irai tēr vaṇ cir̲u kurukē!
Malku nīrk kaṇṇēr̲ku ōr vācakam koṇṭu aruḷāyē. (I–4–5)

Preamble

Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī begs of a heron to convey the following message to her beloved Lord:

"It matters not if I rot here, away from Him. But He is Nārāyaṇa who, by the very implication of that name, resides in all beings and sustains them all, unsought and unsolicited, with no exception whatsoever. Even the solitary exclusion of myself from the scope of His benevolent protection will jeopardise His position of eminence, His very name. It behoves Him, therefore, to avert this calamity."

Translation

Ye little lovely heron, seeking food in water-logged flower gardens,
When you behold Nāraṇan̲, the sole sustainer of the worlds seven,
Will you deign to tell Him that here is one,

With tearful eyes, a sinner He can't throw down,
And bring back any reply He chooses to send on?

Notes

(i) *Line* 4: *With tearful eyes*: Tears welling up and filling the eyes of the Āḻvār would, as it were, serve as an identification mark for him, whether in a state of separation from or union with the Lord. In the former case it would be tears of grief and in the latter, tears of Joy.

(ii) When a doubt was expressed as to how the Saints, soaked in God-love, could address the senseless birds to carry messages to God, the illustrious Nampiḷḷai replied: In affairs of love to God, even storks and stones can serve as messengers, albeit the party at the other end is as exalted as Sītā, the crown jewel of Janaka's clan. On one occasion, Parāśara Bhaṭṭar was informed of the death of a low-caste devotee in such ordinary language as "he has breathed his last." Bhaṭṭar at once admonished his informant and said that the news should have been worded as: "He bade farewell here to go and join the ranks of the celestials in Heaven." He added that caste is of no account, when good men go to God and so also, when messengers are for God, they may be even stones and plants, not to talk of the animate birds.

(iii) *Line* 4: '*a sinner He cannot throw down*': "Having roused my appetite for Him, where there was none before, could He now give me up on account of my past sins? Could He who, as Nārāyaṇa, extends protection to one and all (universal), give up His chosen ones like me? Have I sinned to the extent of making even the oceanic water go dry as it is being pumped out?

Aruḷāta nīr aruḷi, avar āvi tuvarāmuṉ,
Aruḷ āḻip puṭkaṭavīr avar vīti orunāḷ eṉṟu
Aruḷ-aḻi ammāṉaik kaṇṭakkāl, itu colli-
Aruḷ; Āḻi vari vaṇṭē! yāmum eṉ piḷaittōmē ? (I–4–6)

Translation

You bee, with lovely hoops! if you meet my gracious Lord,
Pray tell Him, although He didn't relent thus far, He should
His grace on me shed, ere life from me departs,
And just pass some day through this street,
Mounting the gracious bird (Garuḍa); I shall then steal
A glance at Him. Oh! what is my fault
(That He against me His heart should steel)?

Note

In the preceding stanza, the Lord was advised against imperilling His position as Nārāyaṇa. On second thoughts, the Āḻvār now apprehends the frightful possibility of the Lord staying away from him, choosing the lesser of the two evils, the greater one being contamination by the Āḻvār. Here then is a compromise formula—the Lord, being an ocean of grace, will certainly shed His grace on the Āḻvār also, the sooner the better, that is, ere his life ebbs out; even the simple gesture of His passing through the street where the Āḻvār lives, not often, but just one day, will do. The gracious Garuḍa could certainly oblige the Āḻvār and bring the Lord over here on his shoulders. This was precisely the message conveyed by Sītā to Śrī Rāma through Hanumān. Here is also a painful contrast, Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, separated from her beloved Lord, undergoing all the pangs of mental torture experienced by Śrī Rāma after the abduction of Śitā. The Āḻvār now ruminates and keeps guessing whether his languishing like this without enduring his lot patiently, would be adjudged as his fault. But then, he would also recollect that Śrī Rāma fared no better when apart from Sīta.

Eṉpu iḻai kōppatu pōlap paṉi vāṭai īrkiṉṟatu;
Eṉ piḻaiyē niṉaintaruḷi aruḷāta Tirumālārkku
Eṉ piḻaittāḷ tiruvaṭiyiṉ takaviṉukku eṉṟu oru vāyccol
Eṉ piḻaikkum? iḷaṅ kiḷiyē! yāṉ vaḷartta nī alaiyē. (I–4–7)

Translation

Here am I, tormented by the spine-chilling blast,
Ye young parrot, ain't you the one I reared,

What'll go wrong with you, if you went and enquired
Of 'Tirumāl', who looks solely on my faults
And sheds not His grace on me, what is precisely
My fault that admits not His clemency?

Note

This is the key stanza of this decad. The messages sent in this decad, keep in the forefront the Lord's noble trait of forgiveness (aparādha sahatvaṁ). If the Lord is not prepared to concede even the simple request (as in the preceding stanza) of some day passing through the street where the Āḻvār lives, alienated by his short-comings, the question is now asked, what has happened to His accredited trait of forgiveness, His boundless grace, avidly gorging all our sins. In the inimitable language of 'Iṭu' the Āḻvār queries, "My Lord, have I obstructed the influx of your sweet grace, through over-indulgence in genuflections and circumambulations?"

Nī alaiyē? ciṟu pūvāy! neṭumālārkku eṉ tūtāy
Nōy eṉatu nuval eṉṉa. nuvalātē iruntoḻintāy;
Cāyaloṭu maṇi māmai taḻarntēṉ nāṉ; iṉi uṉatu
Vāy-alakil iṉ-aṭicil vaippārai nāṭāyē. (I–4–8)

Translation

Young Pūvāy, you didn't respond to my appeal
That you should unto Neṭumāl (my Lord) go and reveal
My pangs of separation, but quietly lingered on;
And now that I am sinking, my hue and grace gone,
You shall depart hence and seek those who, thy bill,
With tiny bits of delicious food can fill.

Notes

(i) 'Pūvai' is a nice-looking, tiny bird.

(ii) Here is a thrilling anecdote. With declining health, Peria Tirumalai Nampi, one of the five Preceptors of Śrī Rāmānuja, became too feeble to offer the diurnal worship to the household Deity-Lord Kṛṣṇa, given the pet name of '*The little one dancing for butter*'. And so, one day, drawing aside the drapery that hung before the Deity, he prostrated and recited the last two lines of this particular song (as in the original text), the gist of which has been given above, in the last three lines.

Nāṭāta malar nāṭi, nāḷtōṟum Nāraṇaṉ-taṉ
Vāṭāta malar-aṭikkīḻ vaikkavē vakukkiṉṟu;
Vīṭāṭi vīṟṟiruttal viṉaiaṟṟatu eṉ ceyvatō?
Ūṭāṭu paṉi vāṭāy! uraittu īrāy eṉatu uṭalē. (I–4–9)

Translation

You biting blast, ever on the move, enquire of Nāraṇaṉ, my Lord,
Why (my limbs) for diurnal service at His floral feet ordained,
Are this felicity denied and in melancholy steeped;
If from Him, no favourable reply you obtain,
Better (come and) split my body into twain.

Notes

(i) The chill blast, inflicting severe pain on Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, like unto the king's executioners torturing the subjects found guilty of high treason, is addressed by her as follows:

"You see me deep down in dejection, due to long separation from my Lord and it is my grievous misfortune that, in such a state, I abstain from the stipulated daily service, such as gathering choice flowers and placing them reverently at the ever-fresh lotus feet of the Lord, etc. You had better go and ask Him how this has come to pass. If, however, He feels disinclined to take service from me, I beg of you, taking your feet in my hands, to finish me off altogether and thus put an end to this insipid and futile existence".

(ii) The wind is the chief sustainer of life and appropriately symbolises the Ācarya (Preceptor).

Uṭal āḷip piṟappu vīṭu uyir mutalā muṟṟumāyk
Kaṭal āḷi-nīr tōṟṟi, ataṉuḷḷē kaṇvaḷarum
Aṭal-āḷi ammāṉaik kaṇṭakkāl, itu colli,
Viṭal, āḷi maṭa neñcē! viṉaiyōm oṉṟām aḷavē. (I–4–10)

Translation

Oh, my fickle mind, ' tis our birthright to serve the Lord,
Go to Him, holding the bright discus and reclining in the deep sea,
The Architect of all created worlds, and let Him see
Our sad plight; leave Him not till unto Him we get restored.

Note

When the details of service unto the Lord were spelt out by the Āḷvār in the preceding stanza, his mind, bent upon such service, was about to slip out of the body. It is held by some that the Āḷvār requested his mind not to get parted till stability with the Lord was attained. Being, however, a decad where the Āḷvār sends errands, it would be more appropriate to say that he sent his mind also on such an errand, briefing it not to leave the Lord till He eventually deigns to get restored to the Āḷvār.

Aḷavu iyaṉṟa ēḻ ulakattavar perumāṉ kaṇṇaṉai
Vaḷa vayal cūḻ vaṇ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ vāyntu uraitta
Aḷavu iyaṉṟa antāti āyirattuḷ ip pattiṉ
Vaḷa uraiyāl peṟalākum vāṉ ōṅku peru vaḷamē. (I–4–11)

Translation

Those that just recite these sweet songs ten
Out of the metrically perfect thousand, lovingly composed by Caṭakōpaṉ,
Chief of rich and fertile Kurukūr, in adoration
Of Kaṇṇaṉ, Lord of the denizens of the worlds seven,
Will attain the Supreme bliss of service in Heaven.

Notes

(i) In the preceding decad, expatiating on the Supreme Lord's easy accessibility, the Saint wanted to abide in the proximate Kṛṣṇa avatāra but failure to achieve it led him to send errands to the Lord in this decad. Having seen the intensity of the love of Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī and her yearning for Divine presence, too deep for words, as revealed in the preceding ten stanzas, the Lord could not stay back any longer, except at the risk of the Āḷvār being lost to this world altogether. The fact that the Lord has been restored to the Saint can be inferred from the very tenor of this stanza, where the Lord is being extolled as the Chief of all the worlds, thus presenting His overlordship and easy-accessibility, side by side.

(ii) Even the mere recital of the text of these stanzas, without so much as delving into their spirit and meaning, will, it is claimed, shoot one up, from the bottom-most depths of worldly existence to the highest state of Service unto the Lord in the High Heavens.

First Centum—Fifth Decad (I-5)
(Vaḷa ēḻ ulakiṉ mutalāya)

Preamble

In each of the preceding four decads, the Āḷvār has highlighted a particular trait of the Lord. These are exaltation (transcendent glory), Worship-worthiness, easy-accessibility (saulabhya) and forgiveness, respectively. In this decad, the Saint brings into focus the Lord's condescension (sauśīlya), mixing freely with the lowliest, the crowning trait of the Lord, heading the list of sixteen traits mentioned by Śrī Vālmīki, in his poser at the very beginning of Rāmāyaṇa*. Śrī Rāma's rapport with Guhā, the hunter, and intimate association with the monkeys, Vibhīṣaṇa etc., illustrate this.

When, in response to the heart-rending, rather, heart-warming appeal of the Āḷvār, in the preceding decad, the Lord presented

* " Konvasmin sāmprataṁ loke, guṇavān, Kaśca vīryavān etc., etc.

Himself before the Āḻvār, in all His grandeur, betokening the enormity of His grace unto the Āḻvār, one should have expected the latter to just jump in and get himself locked up in the Lord's sweet embrace. But what did he do? The Āḻvār beheld, with bewildering amazement, the Lord, in His full splendour, in dire contrast to his own littleness, a very picture of oppressive contrast indeed, oppressive because he dared not defile and desecrate the Great One, taking undue advantage of His condescending love. And so, he attempted to run away from the Lord, a very strange behaviour for which the only possible explanation is that he just got drifted into such a mental complex at the mere thought of the Lord's transcendent glory. Such alternating extremes of behaviour are, however, noticeable in Saint Yāmuṉa, Kūrattāḻvāṉ and his illustrious son, Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar also. As a matter of fact, the draw-backs in us serve as the foil against which the Lord's 'Sauśīlya' (condescension) shines all the more.

Vaḷa ēḻ ulakiṉ mutalāya vāṉōr-iṟaiyai aruviṉaiyēṉ
kaḷavēḻ veṇṇey toṭu uṇṭa kaḷvā! eṉpaṉ; piṉṉaiyum
taḷavu ēḻ muṟuval-piṉṉaikkuāy val āṉ-āyar talaivaṉāy
Iḷa-ēṟu ēḻum taḻuviya entāy! eṉpaṉ niṉaintu naintē. (I–5–1)

Translation

How dare I, a deep-rooted sinner, meditate
On the Lord of all the worlds and Heaven and narrate
The mystery of His stealing butter and taming bulls,
As a cow-herd boy for the hand of Piṉṉai. the damsel
Of bewitching smile, and (pretend to) thaw down in ecstasy?

Note

The Āḻvār, in his present mood of self-denouncing humility, feels that he has defiled and desecrated the Supreme Lord by word, when he recounted His mysterious deeds and addressed Him as 'My Sire', by thought, when he meditated on Him, and by deed, when he melted down, in ecstasy, as it were, a mockery of devotion.

niṉaintu naintu uḷ karaintu uruki, imaiyōr palarum muṉivarum
puṉainta kaṇṇi nīr cāntam pukaiyōṭu ēnti vaṇaṅkiṉāl,
niṉainta ellāp poruḷkaṭkum vittuāy, mutalil citaiyāmē
maṉam cey ñāṉattu uṉ perumai mācūṇātō? māyōṉē. (I–5–2)

Translation

Oh, wonderful Lord, You are the supreme architect
Of all things conceivable and yet immutable you are!
Will it not from your glory great detract
If (Brahmā and other) Devas, Sages and others
(Your creatures all) meditate on you, thaw down and unto You offer
Flowers, sandal paste, sacramental water and incense burn?

Notes

(i) In this stanza, the Āḻvār realises that he is unfit even to say that he has defiled the Lord. What is his title, either way, to dabble in God-head? It is something like a person, who, by reason of his birth, is precluded from learning the Vedas, saying that he has not learnt the Vedas, as if he has failed to learn a thing he is entitled to learn. This feeling of the Āḻvār could be inferred from his present observation that even the worship offered through their triple faculties of word, deed and thought, by the exalted Devas, like Brahmā, and Sages of the eminence of Sanaka, pales into insignificance and would only detract from His great glory, as the Supreme Architect of all. It is little better than a team of ants worshipping the majestic lion.

(ii) Once the seed is sown, what comes up is the tree; cotton disappears, when turned into thread which again disappears, when turned into a fabric. But it redounds to the great glory of the Lord, one of His many marvels, that He remains unchanged despite His being the material cause of the entire universe. Well, What glory is there in His being worshipped by His own creatures? It would make sense only if the Lord is

worshipped by persons of comparable stature but alas! there is none falling in this category.

mā yōṉikaḷāy naṭai kaṟṟa vāṉōr palarum muṉivarum
nī yōṉikaḷaip paṭai eṉṟu, niṟai nāṉmukaṉaip paṭaittavaṉ;
cēyōṉ ellā aṟivukkum; ticaikaḷ ellām tiruvaṭiyāl
tāyōṉ; ellā ev uyirkkum tāyoṉ; tāṉ ōr uruvaṉē. (I–5–3)

Translation

He who created the profound Nāṉmukaṉ (Brahmā) and bade him create
The exalted Vāṉōr (Devas), Sages and several others,
He who is beyond comprehension, whose lovely feet
Spanned the worlds, who unto all is like a Mother,
Is our unique Lord (as condescending as He is great).

Note

Finding the Āḷvār in a state of unparalleled humility, shrinking back, the Lord draws his attention to the other mellowing aspect, namely, His loving condescension. Did He not span the entire universe with utter impartiality and set His tender feet over hill and dale, and one and all, without distinction of high and low? Contemplating this episode, the Āḷvār got into a mid-condition in which he would neither approach the Lord nor get away from Him but keep talking of the unique combination in the Lord, of exaltation and condescension, which cannot be found in any one else.

tāṉ ōr uruvē taṉi vittuāy, taṉṉiṉ mūvar mutalāya
vāṉōr palarum muṉivarum maṟṟum maṟṟum muṟṟum āy,
tāṉ ōr perunīr taṉṉuḷḷē tōṟṟi, ataṉuḷ kaṇvaḷarum
vāṉōr perumāṉ; mā māyaṉ vaikuntaṉ em perumāṉē. (I–5–4)

Preamble

Finding the Āḷvār, a little less scared of the Lord's exaltation than a little while ago, some persons asked him what exactly he was intending to do, whether to get near the Lord or get away from Him. This stanza provides the answer to this question, real or supposed. The Āḷvār says:

" Even if I wish to keep aloof, my Lord would not give me up. Look at His condescending love of amazing dimensions. The great Creator of all the worlds and all classes of sentient and non-sentient beings, the Supreme Master of all, including the celestials in the High Heaven, above wants of any kind, reclining on the bosom of the vast expanse of water in Yoga nidrā, is now right here to claim me as His inalienable property '.

Translation

The Supreme Lord beside whom there was none,
Created the first three (Brahmā, Śiva and Indra), this, that and the other,
(Devas, Sages, men, birds, beasts and all) with no *external aid* (i) whatever
And reposed (in Yoga nidrā) on the vast expanse of water,
He had raised; the wondrous Lord, Chief of celestials, Vaikuntaṉ, is also my *Master* (ii).

Notes

(i) The Lord is at once the *Material* (Upādāna) cause, *Operative* (nimitta) cause and *Instrumental or efficient* (Sahakāri) cause of Creation.

(ii) This is the key word for this stanza. The Master has come to reclaim His property (the Āḷvār) and He shall not be a party to its slipping through the fingers.

māṉ ēy nōkki maṭavāḷai mārpil koṇṭāy; mātavā!
kūṉē citaiya uṇṭai vil niṟattil teṟittāy; kovintā!
vāṉ ār cōti maṇivaṇṇā! matucūtā! nī aruḷāy uṉ
tēṉē malarun tiruppātam cērumāṟu viṉaiyēṉē (I–5–5)

Preamble

There are two ways of looking at the background of this stanza. The first is: With the recession of his self-abnegating humility, the Āḷvār prays for the felicity of constant attendance on the Lord, in close proximity. The other is: Intent upon stabilising the Āḷvār's longing for Him so that there is no slipping back again, the Lord intensifies the longing by keeping away from him for a while.

Unable to stand this separation, the Āḻvār cries out his heart, invoking the Lord's grace for reunion.

Translation

On your winsome chest, you hold doe-eyed Mother, Oh, Mātavā,
With perfect ease, you remove *the hunch* (i) off a damsel, oh, Kōvintā,
Your sapphire hue radiates the entire heaven, oh, *Matucūtā* (ii)
Your *grace* (iii), this sinner invokes to reach your lotus feet, shedding honey.

Notes

(i) The underlying episode could be either the one stated here, pertaining to Kṛṣṇāvatāra or yet another pertaining to Rāmāvatāra. The former is: As Kṛṣṇa was wending His way through the main road of Mathura along with Balarāma, Tṛvakrā, the hump-backed young woman with handsome features, was passing along with a vessel containing sweet-smelling sandal paste, specially prepared by her for King Kamsa. Kṛṣṇa accosted her and demanded of her some of that excellent preparation. Entranced by Their bewitching looks, she gave the Divine Brothers the thick aromatic paste, with all her heart. Greatly pleased with the service, Śrī Kṛṣṇa deftly transformed her at once into a straight-backed damsel, erect and elegant.

The episode in Rāmāyaṇa relates to Śrī Rāma having hit, out of a boyish prank, the hump on the back of the hunch-backed Mantarā, the maid-servant of Queen Kaikeyī, with unerring aim and caused her great pain. She then bore her suffering silently but wreaked her vengeance on Rāma, at the crucial moment, by poisoning the mind of Kaikeyī. But then, this mischief is attributed to Govinda, that is, Kṛṣṇa in this stanza, which is apparently a misfit. There is, however, the following explanation for this in Nampiḷḷai's 'Īṭu': 'Govinda' could also

mean, 'Protector of the Earth', in which case, the address could fit in with Rāma, as well. Alternately, Kṛṣṇa, with so many mischievous pranks up His sleeves, could easily be made the butt for each and every frolic, whether perpetrated by Him or not, even as the saying goes, "All sins shall be heaped on Amaṇa's head". And now, who is this poor Amaṇa, earning such vicarious notriety? Amaṇa or Śamaṇa is an ascetic of the jain religious order. A complaint went to the King who was a simpleton. The complaint arose from the mud wall of a Brahmin's house giving way and killing a thief who broke into it. When the thief's friends demanded of the Brahmin compensation, both parties appealed to the King for justice. The King asked the Brahmin to pay compensation, as the thief died because of the wet wall. The Brahmin, however, put the blame on the mason who built the Wall. The mason appeared in court and pleaded that it was all the mistake of the waterman who had poured too much water. The waterman blamed the potter who had made the pot big. The potter excused himself by putting the blame on a dancing girl, who passed along and diverted his attention while making the pot. The dancing girl, in turn, blamed the washerman, who failed to bring her clothes in time, and necessitated her visit to his house. The dhoby too trotted out an excuse that the stone on which he washed the clothes was occupied by a Śamaṇa who wouldn't budge from it for quite a long time, and so the return of clothes to the customers was got delayed. And now, the Śamaṇa kept quiet, on account of his vow of silence and the stupid King construed this silence as admission of guilt and ordered the Śamaṇa to be hanged. Our pity rather goes to Kṛṣṇa at whose door every fault is laid, in this fashion.

(ii) 'Matucūta', the sanskrit word being 'Madhusūda' means: Slayer of the demon called Madhu.

(iii) The grace which could condone the sin of the Āḷvār, attempting to run away from the Lord like unto the ruthless rejection of the food served at the dining table.

viṉaiyēṉ viṉai tīr maruntu āṉāy! viṇṇōr talaivā! kēcavā!
maṉai cēr āyar-kula mutalē! mā māyaṉē! mātavā!
ciṉai ēy taḷaiya marāmaraṅkaḷ ēḻum eytāy! cirītarā!
iṉaiyāy! iṉaiya peyariṉāy! eṉṟu naivaṉ aṭiyēṉē. (I–5–6)

Translation

Oh, Kēcava, reigning supreme in the high Heavens
Thou art the antidote for this sinner's (dire) sins.
Oh, Mātavā, of mysterious deeds! Chief of cowherds,
The seven trees with branches many! oh, Cirītarā,
Thine arrow pierced.
Dissolve do I, recounting such other deeds of yours
And the relative names You are pleased to bear.

Note

This is a song sung in the same mood as the immediately preceding song.

aṭiyēṉ ciṟiya ñāṉattaṉ; aṟital ārkkum ariyāṉai,
kaṭi cēr taṇ am tuḷāyk kaṇṇi puṉaintāṉ-taṉṉai, kaṇṇaṉai,
ceṭi ār ākkai aṭiyāraic cērtal tīrkkum tirumālai,
aṭiyēṉ kāṇpāṉ alaṟṟuvaṉ; itaṉiṉ mikku ōr ayarvu uṇṭē? (I–5–7)

Translation

This humble self of meagre intellect pines to meet
Kaṇṇaṉ, sporting tulacī garland, cool and lovely, of fragrance sweet,
Beyond the Comprehension of one and all (however great),
'Tirumāl', who, unto those that seek Him, does cut out
Their bondage dense; is there anything more indiscreet?

Note

The preceding song ended on a despondent note, showing the Āḷvār sinking down, due to the poignance of separation from the Lord. The merciful Lord would not run the risk of testing him anymore, and was about to oblige him with His presence. Sensing this, however, the Āḷvār was once more weighed down by inferiority complex, egging him on to retreat again. The Āḷvār has all along vociferously condemned those who are content with mere self-enjoyment (Kaivalya) after perennial disembodiment, that is, liberation from the cycle of birth and death, which is far inferior to the bliss of constant service unto the Lord in Heaven. In the present context, however, the Āḷvār is inclined to hold that even this would be wholesome, as compared to a state of embodiment such as his, with its potentiality for such blasphemous conduct as pining for the Lord's presence and mixing with Him, thereby defiling His sacred person. This is indeed the limit for the Āḷvār's humility (naicya).

uṇṭāy ulaku ēḻ muṉṉamē; umiḻntu māyaiyāl pukku,
uṇṭāy veṇṇey ciṟu maṉicar uvalai ākkai nilai eyti;
maṇ-tāṉ cōrntatu uṇṭēlum, maṉicarkku ākum pīr ciṟitum
aṇṭāvaṇṇam, maṇ karaiya, ney-ūṇ maruntō? māyōṉē (I–5–8)

Translation

Wondrous Lord, Once you ate up all the worlds seven
And then spat them out, You then came at your volition
Into this world, assuming the frail form of a human
And ate all the butter (in Gokul) leaving no remnant;
Could it be that you thus sought to dissolve the remnants
Of mud still sticking inside and keep off indigestion,
The fell sickness that befalls humans? (I think it wasn't that).

Note

We are indeed under a deep debt of gratitude to those intellectual stalwarts, our great *Pūrvācāryas*, which we can hardly repay. Look at how they have delved in and unfolded the genesis of this song, from the way it has been worded. The Lord was bent upon having a rapport with the Āḷvār and hit upon a plan which would work well and bring round the Āḷvār, shaking off his inferiority complex. There ensued a dialogue wherein the Lord wanted to elicit from the Āḷvār the purpose of His having come down to Gokul,

as a cowherd and gobbled up all the available butter. When the Āḻvār pleaded ignorance, the Lord Himself gave out that it was just an antidote against the ill-effects of the mud, if any, still sticking inside His stomach, which had once kept all the seven worlds within and thrown them out after some time. The Āḻvār could hardly swallow such a fantastic explanation, firstly, because of the heavy time-lag between the two events and secondly, because there was no reason why He should have appropriated to Himself all the butter produced in that pastoral village, if it was to be a mere medicine. The Āḻvār opined that the Lord ate up avidly all that butter because it was produced by the loving hands of His devotees, a produce which He coveted very much and would not mind taking even stealthily, when not given for the asking. Precisely here, the Āḻvār fell into the Lord's trap. The Lord was quick to point out that the Āḻvār was dear to Him for the same reason and, by trying to keep aloof from Him, he would only join the rank and file of those who tried to keep the butter from Him.

māyōm; tīya alavalaip peru mā vañcap pēy vīyat
tūya kuḻaviyāy viṭap pāl amutā amutu ceytiṭṭa
māyaṉ, vāṉōr taṉit talaivaṉ, malarāḷ maintaṉ, ev uyirkkum
tāyōṉ, tammāṉ, eṉ ammāṉ, ammā mūrttiyaic cārntē. (I–5–9)

Translation

The unique Lord of celestials, *Malarāḷ's* (the lotus-born Lakṣmī's) Consort,
A veritable Mother (unto all) who His own Sovereign is,
As well as mine, the typical (but wondrous) babe that killed outright
The highly treacherous and loquacious demoness
Whose poisonous milk He sucked as if it were nectar (amṛt)
Close unto the exalted one am I; may we never again be apart.

Note

Here is the continuation of the dialogue referred to in the preceding stanza. The Āḻvār observed that unlike the palatable butter, mixing with him, a terrible sinner, will be bitter like poison. But the Lord had a ready reply for this also. He pointed out that even the milk of the poisonous breast of Pūtaṉā, the evil-minded imposter of a mother, was sucked by Him, with great relish, as if it were nectar. So saying, He pounced upon the Āḻvār and got hold of him. The Āḻvār also responded by avowing that he will never again part from Him. The line in this song narrating that the Lord, typical of a tender babe, relished the poisonous milk tendered by Pūtaṉā like nectar, follows the text of 'Harivamśaṁ'.*

cārnta iru val-viṉaikaḷum carittu, māyap paṟṟu aṟuttu,
tīrntu, taṉpāl maṉam vaikkat tirutti, vīṭu tiruttuvāṉ:
ārnta ñāṉac cuṭar āki, akalam kīḻ mēl aḷavu iṟantu,
nērnta uruvāy, aruvākum ivaṟṟiṉ uyirām neṭumālē. (I–5–10)

Translation

Of resplendent knowledge, full and flooding,
All things, with or without form, He is pervading
Up and down and all around; Neṭumāl (of love supreme)
Rid me of my age-long sins of commission and omission and in Him
Rooted my mind firmly, freed from ignorance and attachments
And is now intent upon giving heaven a face-lift(to put me in).

Note

Immensely pleased with the assurance given by the Āḻvār in the previous song not to get parted from Him any more, the Lord now contemplates putting the Āḻvār in Heaven, so as to eliminate the possible risk of further separation from Him. And for this purpose, the Lord, in His unbounded love for the Āḻvār, wants to renovate even that Eternal Land, ever fresh and pure, which hardly needs touching up or a face-lift, as such! Indeed, The Āḻvār feels enthralled by the Lord's extraordinary love for him (as the word 'Neṭumāl' in the text connotes).

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* 'Sthanyaṁ tat viṣa sammiśraṁ rasyamāsīth jagad Guro '.

mālē! māyap perumāṉē! mā māyavaṉē! eṉṟu eṉṟu,
mālē ēṟi māl aruḷāl maṉṉu kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
pāl ēy tamiḻar icaikārar pattar paravum āyirattiṉ
pālē paṭṭa ivai pattum vallārkku illai parivatē. (I–5–11)

Translation

Those conversant with these songs ten,
Out of the thousand sung by Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
Firm recipient of the Lord's grace, in ecstatic adoration
Of His wondrous deeds and glorious traits, evoking the admiration
Alike of the 'Sweet-as-milk' Tamil-Scholars, devotees and musicians,
Shall for ever be free from affliction.

Notes

(i) The accent here is on the redemptive grace of the Lord, Who, by His condescending love, reclaimed the Āḻvār, thwarting his attempt to run away from Him in a frightfully unsettled state of mind.

(ii) These songs are of matchless grandeur and inestimable value for those who want to revel in singing sweet songs of a high order. And again, for those who want to delve into their meanings and eke out their time usefully, these songs afford unlimited scope.

First Centum—Sixth Decad (I-6)
(Parivatu il īcaṉai)

Preamble

Following the pattern, hitherto noticed, of bringing to the fore a particular auspicious trait of the Lord in each decad (Tiruvāymoḻi), 'Swārādatva' (i.e.) easy worshippability of the Lord is emphasised in this decad. Unlike the minor deities whom it is very hard to propitiate, what with the sacrifice of goats and hens and other such harsh demands on their votaries, the Lord is pleased with whatever is offered to Him lovingly, with pious will. Being above wants of any kind, it is unthinkable that He would want from us any offering at all. God sets greater value upon the devotion of the heart than the material value of outward offerings. He hates hypocrisy and estimates the sincerity of the soul. In His song Celestial, He has affirmed: 'Whoever offers Me in faith and love, a leaf (as Draupati did), a flower (as Gajendra did), a fruit (as Sabhari did), water poured forth (as Ambarīṣā did), that offering I accept, lovingly made with pious will. Things, easy of procurement for all, including the poorest of the poor, offered, not for expiation of sins or securing other ends but considering giving to Me as an end in itself and out of sheer inability to exist without making a love-gift to Me are indeed acceptable. In the absence of the devotee's inability to offer anything for eating, I consume even the leaves and flowers offered. Vidura gave me plantain skins and Kuchela gave me but poor beaten rice and yet, I devoured them all with great avidity, like a famished fellow''.

The outward offerings may be trifles but, in God's eye, they carry much weight, when offered in humility and devotion. Once some Princes had a desire to offer campaka flower to Lord Jagannatha at Pūri, knowing that it is His favourite flower. On going to the flower market, they found that all but a single flower had already been sold out. Each one of the Princes was keen on buying it and offered competitive price. One of them staked his entire fortune, bought the flower and offered it to the Lord. That night, God appeared in the Prince's dream and said, "The debt of thy flower is very heavy. I cannot bear its weight", thus showing His gracious acceptance of the sincerely made offering. As already stated, the Lord is above wants of any kind, and yet He greedily grabs at the selfless service rendered unto Him by the devotees disinterestedly, as an end in itself. In this decad, the Āḻvār enjoys and extols this great trait of the Lord.

parivatu il īcaṉaip pāṭi virivatu mēval uṟuvīr!
pirivakai iṉṟi nal nīr tūy, purivatuvum pukai pūvē. (I–6–1)

Translation

Ye zealous seekers of salvation, rise to your full stature,
Singing the praise of our griefless God;

Serve Him with water pure, seeking no personal good,
Burn incense before Him and flowers do offer.

Notes

(i) This song is addressed to the seekers of salvation who should naturally rise to their full stature through complete expansion, rather, realisation of their true or essential nature.

(ii) Being the repository of innumerable auspicious traits, a veritable fountain of inexhaustible bliss, the Lord is naturally free from grief of any kind, on His own. But then, He grieves over the woes of His countless subjects and this trait of commisseration with the miseries of others, with a complete sense of identity and deep compassion for them, is indeed praiseworthy. Actually, this heads the list of many good qualities noticed in Śrī Rāma by the Citizens of Ayodhyā and enumerated by them in King Daśaratha's court. Even so, the question is asked, why the Almighty Lord who can jolly well quell all our miseries in no time, should grieve for us, as we weaklings do, merely expressing our grief over the miseries of others, being incapable of giving them any kind of relief. This erroneous impression can be set at naught if we take into account our own every day experience, the parents feeling distressed over the sufferings of the young ones, notwithstanding the active steps taken by the former promptly to administer the requisite relief to the latter. Draupati, in dire distress, was no doubt prevented from getting disrobed due to the plentiful supply of clothes arranged for by Lord Kṛṣṇa, and yet, He cried out His heart, lamenting that He remained a debtor unto Draupati, having failed to be present at the scene of the dastardly occurence and worse still, having failed to avert the incident altogether. When Gajendra, the elephant raised a pitecus alarm for succour at the end of a titanic struggle with its mighty opponent, the crocodile, the Lord went post-haste to the scene of distress and retrieved the elephant. All the same, the Lord very much repented that He had not rushed to Gajendrā's aid much earlier.

(iii) Serving the Lord who is but our Father, should by-no-means be difficult, seeing that the son need have no qualms nor be fastidious and fretsome, in regard to the food served to his own father, by virtue of the natural bonds of Kinship and mutual concern. Discoursing on this song, Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar pointed out that the text of the song bears out that no flower is taboo, and in the name of burning incense, as part of worship, even waste wooden chips from the carpenter's chisel could be burnt and smoke raised therefrom. There is no specification, as such, regarding the flower to be offered and the incense to be burnt. When his stalwart disciple, Nañcīyar, observed that there is a śāstraic injunction against the use of the flower, known in Samskṛit as 'Kar ḍakārika', for the Lord's worship, Bhaṭṭārya elucidated that the injunction in question is solely weighted in favour of the worshipper, to eliminate the risk involved in plucking this flower from its thorny plant.

matuvār taṉ am tūḷāyāṉ mutu vēta mutalavaṉukku,
etu ētu eṉ paṇi eṉṉātu, atuvē āḷ-ceyyum īṭē. (I–6–2)

Translation

" What service is there, and that too, for poor me,
Appropriate to the Primate, the colossal Lord, by Vedas revealed,
Wearer of nice, cool, ' tulacī ' garland, shedding honey? "
If one doesn't think so (and shrink), by him is the Lord well served indeed.

Notes

(i) Having ruled out, in the preceding song, the restriction regarding the thing to be offered to the Lord, the Āḷvār now stresses the fact that there is also no restriction regarding the persons eligible to serve Him. If one does not shrink back from the Lord's service, in

bewildering amazement that there is hardly any service that can be rendered, appropriate to the colossal stature of the Lord and, that too, by one with serious limitations, it is as good as having served the Lord. In other words, there is hardly any scope for such a feeling of aloofness.

(ii) Even a faded garland coming in contact with the Lord's person will become fresh again and shed copious quantities of honey. That being so, the devotee need not have any qualms in regard to the offerings to be made.

(iii) As Bādarāyaṇa (*Sage Vyāsa*) has pointed out in his 'Brahma Sūtra,' *the Lord can be known only through the authority of the Vedas, as distinguished from Ocular and inferential knowledge. The Supreme Lord is revealed by the Vedas, as the first and foremost.

īṭum eṭuppum il īcaṉ māṭu viṭātu eṉ maṉaṉē;
pāṭum eṉ nā avaṉ pāṭal; āṭum eṉ aṅkam aṉaṅkē. (I–6–3)

Translation

My mind can never be away from Īcaṉ (Lord Supreme),
Who makes no distinction 'tween high and low;
My tongue His glory sings at all times
While my body danceth in ecstatic glow.

Notes

(i) The Lord does not extend special favours by reason of one's high parentage, calibre and conduct, nor does He give up those of low descent, meagre intellect and poor conduct. He is absolutely impartial. †Prahlāda and Vibhīṣaṇa of Asura and Rākṣasa clan, respectively, were among His beneficiaries. If the other Asuras and Rākṣasas came to grief the fault was not with

* 'Śāstra Yōnitvāt'.

† "Devānām Dānavānāñca Sāmānyam adhidhaivatam".

the Lord. It is like a few persons falling, now and then, into the tank dug up for the common good of all and killing themselves.

(ii) It is noteworthy that the Āḻvār stands rivetted to the Lord by word, deed and thought.

aṇaṅku eṉa āṭum eṉ aṅkam vaṇaṅki vaḻipaṭum; īcaṉ
piṇaṅki amarar pitaṟṟum kuṇaṅkeḻu koḷkaiyiṉāṉē. (I–6–4)

Translation

Īcaṉ (the Lord) I venerate, dancing in gay abandon,
Is the natural repository of many an auspicious trait,
Leaving the celestials in the high Heaven,
Entranced and engaged in endless debate.

Note

As the Lord said in Bhagavad-Gītā, His lover's thoughts are rivetted to Him, their lives are nestled in Him and their conversation is solely about Him, full of mutual enlightenment and entertainment. The debate, referred to, in this Song, could arise from the adoration of the Lord by the Celestials, from different angles, one group talking about the Lord's transcendent glory and the other about His easy accessibility and loving condescension. The Āḻvār marvels at that even his faculties vie with the experience of that exalted band in heaven.

koḷkai koḷāmai ilātāṉ eḻkal irākam ilātāṉ:
viḻkai viḷḷāmai virumpi uḷ kalantārkku ōr amutē. (I–6–5)

Translation

Not given to likes and dislikes, acceptance or rejection,
Of (service from) devotees, looking to their attainments alone,
A nectar of incomparable excellence, the Lord is
Unto those that with Him do mingle, giving up all else.

Note

In the preceding song, the Āḻvār presented to us the Lord as One, who would welcome to His benevolent fold every one,

without distinction of high and low, seeking His protection. And now, we are told that the Lord is free from likes and dislikes and is, therefore, not prone to extend preferential treatment to some and be indifferent to others on the basis of their individual attainments, while enlisting them in His service. All that He looks for is whether these devotees are steadfast in their devotion, true to their essential nature of being the objects of His sole enjoyment (ananya bhōg-yatva) or merely seek from Him the fulfilment of their own personal desires, the odds and ends. While the latter class seeking the lesser fruits get what they want and also get parted from the Lord in the bargain, to the former class who stand rivetted to, and nestled, in Him, He is a veritable nectar of incomparable excellence, ever fresh and insatiable.

amutam amararkaṭku īnta nimir cutar-āḻi neṭumāl
amutilum āṟṟa iṉiyaṉ: nimir tirai nīḷ kaṭalāṉē. (I–6–6)

Translation

Of limitless glory, Neṭumāl, holding the discus
Of mounting radiance and reclining on the spacious
Milk-Ocean of surging waves, is more appetising indeed
Than the ambrosia which unto Amarars (Devas) He once delivered.

Note

The Āḻvār has nothing but contemptuous pity for the Devas who sought the 'amṛt' obtained by churning the Milk-Ocean, instead of the far more delicious Lord holding the effulgent discus, enchanting beyond words. Although the Āḻvār's contempt for the Devas is not explicit from the text of the song, the episode of delivering the "amṛt" to the Devas, referred to, in the first line of the song, pales into insignificance before the Lord's own nectarean presence and exquisite charm enjoyed by the Āḻvār in the second line of the song and thus indirectly exhibits the Devas at a dis-advantage. The Āḻvār has given yet another name to the Lord, namely, '*One who is more appetising than ambrosia*'. Nampi Tiruvaḻutirāṭu Tācar remarked that the Devas

were no better than the bovine species, not looking up and beholding the exquisite charm of the Lord churning and moving around with His thousand sinewy shoulders and the beautiful garlands adorning them. Instead, they were gazing at the ocean, with their heads bent down, content with a mere extract from the salt-water, what a pity !

nīḷ kaṭal cūḻ ilaṅkaik kōṉ tōḷkaḷ talai tuṇiceytāṉ
tāḷkaḷ talaiyil vaṇaṅki, nāḷkaḷ talaikkaḻimiṉṉē. (I–6–7)

Translation

If you bow unto Him Who Smote
The heads and shoulders of the King
Of Laṅkā, with the long sea as its moat,
The ocean of time, it helps crossing.

kaḻimiṉ toṇṭirkaḷ! kaḻittut toḻumiṉ avaṉai; toḻutāl,
vaḻi niṉṟa valviṉai māḷvittu aḻiviṉṟi ākkam tarumē. (I–6–8)

Translation

Ye, servants of God, sever your contacts
With all things ungodly and serve the Lord;
Your age-long, sturdy sins, the Lord will cut out
And grant you eternal bliss and beatitude.

taruma arum payaṉ āya tirumakaḷār taṉik kēḷvaṉ
perumai uṭaiya pirāṉār irumai viṉai kaṭivārē. (I–6–9)

Translation

The bliss very dear, Tirumakaḷ's unique Spouse confers,
The Benefactor great (in her glorious company) full of grace,
The fruits of actions, good and bad, He severs,
(The impediments to the free flow of His grace).

Notes

(i) Tirumakaḷ, (Goddess Mahālakṣmī) is the very embodiment of grace.* Her perpetual presence by the side of the

* 'Lakṣmyā saha Hṛṣīkeśo Devyā Kārunya rūpayā' (Śri Pāñcarātra.)

Lord is intended to prepare the ground for the supplication by the individual souls, at all times, without any restriction whatsoever. Although the Lord is the ultimate giver and deliverer, yet He invariably acts only when Mahālakṣmī plays the recommendatory role, mediating and pleading for erring souls.

(ii) For the attainment of final bliss, both merit (Puṇya) and demerit (Pāpa or Sins) are impediments. As Śrī Vedānta Deśika has put it, in his ' Varadarāja Pancāsat ', the former is a golden fetter while the latter is an iron fetter. A golden fetter is still a fetter and thus both ' Puṇya ' and ' Pāpa ' impede one's advancement to the final goal. Hence the need to cut out both, an act of grace galore, on the part of Lakṣmī-Kānta (the gracious Consort of Goddess Mahālakṣmī).

kaṭivār tīya viṉaikaḷ noṭiyārum aḷavaikkaṉ;
koṭiyā aṭu puḷ uyartta vaṭivu ār mātavanārē. (I–6–10)

Translation

Mātavaṉ, of exquisite Form,
On whose banner is Garuḍa the bird,
Destroyer of enemies, will, in no time,
Root out the fell sins (we dread).

Note

What is emphasised here is the utmost speed with which Mādhava, the Lord, in conjunction with the Divine Mother, roots out all the evils in us. And what more? The Lord extends to the Soul, reclaimed just then, the same affinity as He holds for the pre-eminent Garuḍa, the ' Ever-free angel-Nitya Sūri '. The reclamation is put through in a trice through the instrumentality of Śrī Mahālakṣmī, who urges: " My Lord, here is the supplicant at your door-step, tossed between birth on one side, and death on the other, and smitten, in between, by maladies, both mental and physical; please bestow your grace and redeem him, turning a blind eye to all his sins; else, you may have to write off the entire ' *Līla Vibhūti* ' (Sportive universe) ".

mātavaṉpāl caṭakōpaṉ tītu avam iṉṟi uraitta
ētam il āyirattu ip pattu ōta vallār piṟavārē. (I–6–11)

Translation

Those initiated in these songs ten,
Out of the thousand flawless songs of Caṭakōpaṉ,
Adoring Mātavaṉ as One above the twin faults
(Of aloofness and abandonment), will from rebirth be freed for ever.

Note

It might be apprehended that the Lord is open to the twin faults of (1) Keeping Himself aloof from us with an air of indifference because of His exaltation, and (2) abandoning us, looking to our truck-loads of vices. The Āḻvār avers, in this decad, that the Lord is above these faults, thereby emphasising His easy worshippability.

First Centum—Seventh Decad (I-7)
Piravittuyar aṟa

Preamble

Easy worshippability apart, the Lord should also be adorable. We see around quite a few persons whom it is easy to please but we don't like to court as there is nothing attractive or prepossessing in them. This decad shows that the Lord is highly adorable because of His extraordinary sweetness. As Nampiḷḷai would have it, the Lord is adorable to such an extent that He grows envious of His devotees and wants to adore them, in turn, having Himself tasted the sweetness of adoration. In śloka ' Manujatva tiroitena......... ' of Pādukā Sahaśram, Śrī Vedānta Deśika observes that, unlike the previous Avatāras when the Lord came all alone, He assumed four forms when He came down as Śrī Rāma and the three younger brothers. The purpose behind this was to adore His own pair of sandals which have a high reputation of their own. This He did in His other form as Bharata. Had Rāma come alone, He couldn't have achieved this purpose.

piṟavittuyar aṟa ñāṉattuḷ niṉṟu,
tuṟavic cuṭar-viḷakkam talaippeyvār
aṟavaṉai āḻippaṭai antaṇaṉai
maṟaviyai iṉṟi maṉattu vaippārē (I–7–1)

Translation

(Oh, what a pity!) the Lord, gracious and immaculate,
Sporting the effulgent discus, is tenaciously sought
By those votaries wanting no more than to liberate
Themselves from the miseries of birth and death and get lost
In a state of 'Self-enjoyment' (of the Soul in its free state).

Note

Oh, what a pity! After all the rigours of their disciplines, the '*Kevalas*' rest contented with mere liberation from the cycle of birth and death, followed by 'ātmāvalokana' (i.e.) enjoyment of their own selves in the disembodied state. The tragedy of it is heightened by the fact that they invoked the Lord's grace for attaining this state but failed to be enthralled by His exquisite charm. The Āḻvār detests these people for this tragic failure resulting in their foregoing, for ever, the superior bliss of service unto the Lord. No doubt, in I-5-7, the Āḻvār would appear to have had a word of praise for the '*Kevalas*' but that was in a different context. It may be recalled that the Āḻvār, then stung by a gnawing apprehension of his abject lowliness, felt that possession of a body was fraught with the serious risk of his contaminating and defiling the Lord by mixing with Him and that a disembodied state of existence, as in the case of the 'Kevalas', would, therefore, be quite welcome, being the lesser of the two evils.

vaippu ām, maruntu ām, aṭiyarai valviṉait
tuppu ām pulaṉ aintum tuñcakkoṭāṉ avaṉ;
eppāl evarkkum nalattāl uyarntu uyarntu
appālavaṉ eṅkaḷ āyar-koḻuntē. (I–7–2)

Translation

The Lord is, unto His devotees, the treasure fine
And the unfailing drug; unto the senses five

He shan't make them succumb; of towering bliss,
He's above one and all, in all places,
Beyond speech and thought and yet He's (our Gopāla), the shepherd chief!

Note

Having decried and detested, in the preceding stanza, the '*Kevalas*' seeking from the gracious Lord the inferior stature of *Kaivalya*, the Āḻvār now depicts the Lord in relation to those who seek Him as the goal, to the exclusion of everything else. Towering above all, beyond speech and comprehension, He still condescended to come down here as Gopālakṛṣṇa, of amazing simplicity.

āyar-koḻuntāy, avarāl puṭaiyuṇṇum
māyap pirāṉai, eṉ māṇikkac cōtiyai,
tūya amutaip parukip paruki, eṉ
māyap piravi mayarvu aṟuttēṉē. (I–7–3)

Translation

I drank and drank, without intermission, the nectar pure,
The dazzling gem, the mystic Lord of wondrous deeds,
(Gopāla) the shepherd chief, bound and beaten by cowherds
(For theft of butter) and got my nescience, matter-born, severed.

Notes

(i) Speaking about Gopālakṛṣṇa, in the last song, the Āḻvār had before him the entire panorama of His mysterious deeds and by merely meditating on them, he got all his accumulated nescience, born of age-long material contacts, eradicated in *toto*, root and branch.

(ii) In the by-gone days, the Devas got nectar subject to various conditions. Even so, it is by no means comparable to the Āḻvār's uninhibited and unrestricted Divine experience, drinking deep of that pure nectar which cleansed him thoroughly and rooted out his age-long sins sheathed in ignorance.

mayarvu aṟa eṉ maṉattē maṉṉiṉāṉ-taṉṉai,
uyarviṉaiyē tarum oṇ cuṭark kaṟṟaiyai,
ayarvu il amararkaḷ ātik koḻuntai, eṉ
icaiviṉai, eṉ colli yāṉ viṭuvēṉō (I–7–4)

Translation

Oh! what pretext can I find, from Him to part,
The first Lord of Celestials ever alert,
A beautiful bundle of brilliance, heaping on me continually,
Torrents of knowledge and wisdom, who brought me
Round and to root out my ignorance lodged in me firmly?

Notes

(i) In the preceding song, the Āḻvār acknowledged the Lord's benevolence in rooting out all his ignorance. This is exactly what he had prayed for in his supplication to the Lord in the very first song of his first work (Tiruviruttam). Having achieved his purpose, can the Āḻvār now afford to forget the Lord? No, having removed all the vestiges of ignorance in the Āḻvār, the Lord continually resides in his mind, shutting out effectively the further growth of nescience in him. And what more? He is continually heaping upon the Āḻvār torrents of wisdom (Jñāna) and love (Bhakti). A beautiful bundle of brilliance, He is also the first Lord of the 'Nitya Sūrīs' (Eternal Heroes). How can the Āḻvār get himself divested of One, so great and so charming, ever inducing in him a passionate desire to be very close to Him? Thus, nothing is wanting on the Lord's side to admit of a divorce from Him. If at all one wishes to throw odium on such a loving Lord, it can only be a sin-contrived dodge, like the one in the following anecdote:

(ii) A peasant boy who visited his father-in-law, was asked by the latter to help him to work a water-lift. The two of them started the work early in the morning and the boy who was high up on the lift, naturally felt tired when it was past mid-day. The father-in-law did not, however, have the courtesy to give the young son-in-law the much-needed relief. There upon, the latter, in sheer exasperation, spat on the back of the elder, just to provoke him. "How cool!" exclaimed the elder and went on with the work. The boy sharply jumped down, saying, "Better get hold of one who will spit on you hot!"

viṭuvēṉō-eṉ viḷakkai, eṉ āviyai,
naṭuvē vantu uyyak koḷkiṉṟa nātaṉai,
toṭuvē ceytu iḷa āycciyar kaṇṇiṉuḷ
viṭavē ceytu viḻikkum pirāṉaiyē. (I–7–5)

Translation

The amorous Lord who, by His sweet looks,
Enticed away the young damsels (of Gokula)
Is my Soul, the beacon light, Who unto me reveals
All things; how can I from Him separation brook,
My Saviour grand who did on me alight, all on a sudden?

Note

The damsels of Gokula would even spurn Heaven, but not give up the inseparable company of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The Lord having enthralled the Āḻvār likewise, there is no question of his giving Him up.

pirāan, peru nilam kīṇṭavaṉ, piṉṉum
virāay malart tuḷāy vēynta muṭiyaṉ,
marāmaram eyta māyavaṉ eṉṉuḷ
irāṉ eṉil, piṉṉai yāṉ oṭṭuvēṉō (I–7–6)

Translation

How can I at all survive, if the Benefactor great
Who once retrieved the Earth from the ocean,
On whose crown is the tulacī garland of aroma sweet,
The wonder-Lord whose arrow sped thro' the trees seven,
Should desert me and stay not in my heart?

Note

This is the Āḻvār's reply to a question supposed to have been put to him as to what he would do, in case the Lord forsook

him once again. The Āḻvār rules out such a contingency, seeing that the Lord is a self-less Benefactor like Sandal paste, flower, southerly breeze and the Moon, catering to the happiness of others, seeking nothing in return. Surely, the Āḻvār would not be a willing party to the separation and he just can't survive in such an eventuality. As a matter of fact, the Āḻvār cannot bring himself to believe that the Lord would at all leave him and go without his permission. Did He not, as Śrī Rāma, go even to the extent of clearing up the misgivings in the mind of Sugrīva about His ability to vanquish Vāli and infusing the requisite confidence? Could such a one desert the Āḻvār, who has firm faith in Him?

yāṉ oṭṭi eṉṉuḷ iruttuvaṉ eṉṟilaṉ;
tāṉ oṭṭi vantu, eṉ taṉi neñcai vañcittu,
ūṉ oṭṭi niṉṟu, eṉ uyiril kalantu, iyal-
vāṉ oṭṭumō-iṉi eṉṉai nekiḻkkavē? (I–7–7)

Translation

In my mind I lodged Him not, on my own;
Pledged to get in, the Lord did, on His own,
Enter my mind imperious, unsought,
Stuck avidly to my body and soul and wrought
A silent change in me, drawing me unto Him, so well.
To part from me hence, will such a One agree at all?

Notes

(i) The Lord entered the Āḻvār's mind, pledged, as it were, to do so. This would show that the Āḻvār took no initiative in the matter. On the other hand, self-reliant and imperious that he was, he stood aloof, very much away from Him. But once a determined Lord took possession of the Āḻvār, the latter came under His magic spell, just like the miser who yielded to the resolute beggar, in the anecdote cited below.

(ii) There was a Brāhman who was an abject miser; another was on his way to this man's house to get a breakfast. People on the way told the latter that the man he was going to, was the most sordid wretch who would not give food to any one. Undaunted, the beggar sought out the miser and begged for food, showing his great need. The miser was adamant in refusing food but the beggar would not leave him. The miser had to yield at last and when he asked the beggar to produce his eating plate, the latter opened his garment and showed it. The miser grumbled and exclaimed "He who intends cutting another's throat, certainly brings the sword with him". So saying, he couldn't help handing over to the persevering, rather provoking beggar, a little bit of rice and sauce to get rid of him.

eṉṉai nekiḻkkilum, eṉṉuṭai naṉ-neñcam
taṉṉai akalvikkat tāṉum killāṉ iṉi:
piṉṉai neṭum paṇait tōḷ makiḻ pīṭu uṭai
muṉṉai amarar muḻumutal tāṉē. (I–7–8)

Translation

With His sinewy shoulders in Piṉṉai nestled,
The joyous Lord Who unto the hoary Celestials
Is all in all, cannot from Him separate, with all His might,
My chastened mind, in Him entwined so well, albeit
He, His grip on me, loosens and makes me stay apart.

Note

The Āḻvār avers that history will not repeat itself. Even if the Almighty Lord, in His unbridled independence, tried His utmost to keep the Āḻvār away, He wouldn't succeed in putting aside his chastened mind, inseparably steeped in Him. This robust confidence has indeed the solid backing of Piṉṉai (Goddess Nappinna) the unfailing Intercessor through whose good offices the Āḻvār courted the Lord.

amarar muḻumutal ākiya ātiyai,
amararkku amutu īnta āyar-koḻuntai,
amara aḻumpat tuḻāvi, eṉ āvi
amarat taḻuviṟṟu; iṉi akalummō? (I–7–9)

Translation

The Primate Who unto Celestials is the fountain source
Of all felicities, Who unto *Amarar* (Devas) delivered ambrosia,
The Chief of the cowherds got into my soul, in tight embrace,
With pleasure immense; Could He from me be apart anymore?

Note

Unto the Devas, who wanted 'Amṛt' (ambrosia), the mere extract from the ocean and not the Lord Himself, He gave the Amṛt; He, however, gave Himself to the Cowherds in whose midst He was born, because they wanted Him, the real 'Amṛt' and not that artificial stuff. The Āḷvār's soul got steeped in Him to such an extent and in such a manner that the one couldn't be told from the other and hence there was no question of separation, as if they were two different entities.

akalil akalum; aṇukil aṇukum;
pukalum ariyaṉ, poru allaṉ emmāṉ:
nikar il avaṉ pukaḻ pāṭi iḷaippu ilam
pakalum iravum paṭintu kuṭaintē. (I–7–10)

Translation

Apart from them who from Him keep apart,
Close to them who unto Him get close,
Beyond approach (to the ungodly) but easy of access
(To devotees); entranced do I sing His glory peerless,
Day and night and never feel satiate.

Note

In the immense struggle between the Lord on the one side and the worldings on the other, the latter, swayed by the stronger pull of earthly pleasures, stray away from Him. Indeed, the Lord grieves over this state of affairs. Unto those who seek Him exclusively, He responds so well that it is said, when man walks towards God, He runs towards him. When man ascends to the foot-stool of God, He enters the soul of man.

Inexhaustible are His auspicious qualities and therefore it is that we can never reach the end and feel satiated in singing His praise.

kuṭaintu vaṇṭu uṇṇum tuḻāy muṭiyāṉai
aṭainta teṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
miṭainta col-toṭai āyirattu ip pattu
uṭaintu nōykaḷai ōṭuvikkumē. (I–7–11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the well-knit thousand,
Composed by Caṭakōpaṉ of Teṉkurukūr, in worship bound
To the Lord, wearing on His crown tulacī garland,
Whose honey the swarming bees partake, will all our ill disband.

First Centum—Eighth Decad (I-8)
Ōṭum puḷ ēṟi

Preamable

In this decad, the Āḷvār brings to the fore the Lord's quality of 'Uprightness' (*ārjava* or *rujuḥ*), His transparence in word, deed and thought, free from sophistry, duplicity, mental reservation, mischievous distortion etc. The Lord would not mean one thing, say another and do a third thing. When Sūrpaṇakhā saw Śrī Rāma at Pañcavaṭi and interrogated Him about His personal history, there would have been nothing wrong if He had tactfully withheld the truth from the demoness. But it was not in His grain to do so and hence He gave out the actual fact with remarkable sincerity.

Tirukkurukaippirāṉ Piḷḷāṉ, the earliest glossator on 'Tiruvāymoḷi,' holds that this decad highlights the Lord's wealth (*Aiśvarya*). The other commentators, Periyavāccāṉ Piḷḷai and Vaṭakku Tiruvīti Piḷḷai, however, prefer to bring into focus the Lord's '*ārjava*' in this decad, as stated at the outset.

ōṭum puḷ ēṟi, cūṭum taṉ-tuḷāy,
nīṭu niṉṟavai āṭum: ammāṉē. (I–8–1)

Translation

The Lord (in heaven) does avidly mingle
With the exalted celestials, one and all;
Takes He a lightning ride on a bird (Garuḍa)
And sports the cool tulacī garland delectable.

Note

This refers to the state of affairs in the yonder heaven. The Lord is said to regale one and all over there, by granting them suitable opportunities for rendering Him the appropriate service.

ammāṉāyp piṉṉum em māṇpum āṉāṉ:
vem mā vāy kīṇṭa cem mā kaṇṇaṉē. (I–8–2)

Translation

Our Sire (the Lord) with large, red eyes
Came down as Kaṇṇaṉ (and mingled with us)
Tore He the mouth of the demon fierce,
Who (to Kill Him) came as a horse,
Many indeed are His incarnations glorious

Note

Although specific mention has been made here of the Lord's incarnation as Kṛṣṇa, there is also a broad reference to all His Avatāras as well, wherein He mixes with the worldlings with remarkable transparence, even as He does with the denizens in heaven.

kaṇ āvāṉ eṉṟum maṇṇōr viṇṇōrkku:
taṇ ār vēṅkaṭa viṇṇōr veṟpaṉē. (I–8–3)

Translation

The Lord who is like unto a pair of eyes
For those on Earth and Heaven,

Stays in Vēṅkaṭam, cool and nice,
The Celestials' favourite haven.

Note

Like unto the mother of twins lying in between her two kids, the Lord stays in Tiruvēṅkaṭam (in Andhra Pradeś), the meeting ground of the Earthlings and the Celestials. The Āḻvār even goes to the extent of calling this glorious hilly retreat as the home of the Celestials, on the ground that the Celestials visiting it far exceed the number of the earthly visitors. Actually, it is the amazing simplicity of the Supreme Lord, making Himself easily accessible even to the monkeys and hunters around this sacred spot, that drags the celestials on to this centre. It is reverently held by our elders that the fauna and flora on the sacred Hills are but Celestials transplanted there.

veṟpai oṉṟu eṭuttu, oṟkam iṉṟiyē,
niṟkum ammāṉ cīr kaṟpaṉ vaikalē. (I–8–4)

Translation

Let me every day utter (and adore)
The Lord's grace galore;
Mount (Govardhana) He did lift
And stood with ease (holding it aloft).

Notes

(i) Periyāḻvār extols the effortless holding by Śrī Kṛṣṇa of Govardhana Mountain, days on end, without the slightest strain on His fingers and nails (Periyāḻvār Tirumoḻi III-5-10).

(ii) Śrī Kūrattāḻvāṉ also exclaims, in sloka 45 of *Varadarāja Stavaṁ* that the Lord held Mount Govardhana continually for seven days and yet, His fingers were as fresh as ever.

(iii) The irate Indra, out to destroy the pastoral life of Gokul, could have well been destroyed by Śrī Kṛṣṇa but He relented, hoping that Indra would soon recover

from this temporary aberration caused by the deprivation of the offerings. At the same time, He shielded the entire pastoral community by holding the mountain aloft like an umbrella for seven long days, till Indra's fury abated. The Āḷvār, on his part, would never feel tired of recounting this episode, rather he subsists on it.

vaikalum veṇṇey kaikalantu uṇṭāṉ
poy kalavātu eṉ mey kalantāṉē. (I–8–5)

Translation

The Lord stretched His hands as far as He could,
(Snatched) the butter and ate (as much as He liked);
Truly, He my body liked in that fashion
And there ensued the grand fusion.

Note

On the one hand, the Āḷvār goes into raptures in contemplation of the Lord's auspicious attributes and, on the other, the Lord covets the Āḷvār's body with the same avidity with which He swallowed butter in Gokula.

kalantu eṉ āvi nalam koḷ nātaṉ
pulaṉ koḷ māṇāy nilam koṇṭāṉē. (I–8–6)

Translation

The Lord Who unto me adhered
And did my Soul make good
Took, as a Midget (Vāmaṉa) of enthralling form,
Land (of three strides) as alms.

Note

As dwarfish Vāmaṉa of bewitching personality, He enticed away Emperor Bali and made all his possessions, His own; likewise, mixing now with the Āḷvār, the Lord has taken possession of his soul and made him His sole servitor, in keeping with his essential nature.

koṇṭāṉ ēḷ viṭai, uṇṭāṉ ēḷ vaiyam,
taṉ tāmam ceytu eṉ eṉ tāṉ āṉāṉē. (I–8–7)

Translation

Tamed He the unruly bulls seven,
Held He in His stomach the worlds seven
And thinking my own thoughts (in reverse direction)
He took to my body as if it were cool heaven.

Notes

(i) To win the hand of the bewitching young damsel, Nappiṉṉai, a niece of Yaśodhā, the unruly bulls were the impediments; the Lord, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, overcame them and secured the coveted bride. Likewise, the Āḷvār's sins, the impediments for the Lord getting at him, were rooted out by Him and the Āḷvār taken possession of.

(ii) During the period of deluge, the Lord held within Himself all the worlds and sustained them and now, He could sustain Himself only by entering the Āḷvār's soul and dissolving into it.

(iii) The Āḷvār was pining for his ascent to Heaven, dipping in the Sacred river Vrajā, coursing on its border and chanting Sāma Veda in heaven; these very thoughts the Lord would, however, think in the reverse order, namely, pining for the Āḷvār's body in Tirunakari, dipping in the river Tāmraparṇi and singing the hymns composed by the Sweet-tongued poet (Madhura Kavi) in adoration of the Āḷvār.

āṉāṉ āṉ-āyaṉ mīṉōṭu ēṉamum
tāṉ āṉāṉ, eṉṉil, tāṉ āya caṅkē. (I–8–8)

Translation

Myriads are the Lord's incarnations;
As the Cowherd He came down,
Fish, Boar and many other forms
He took, just to get hold of me.

Note

The Āḻvār feels that the innumerable Avatāras of the Lord were all for his delectation, mainly directed towards getting hold of him and uniting with him.

caṅku cakkaram aṅkaiyil koṇṭāṉ
eṅkum tāṉāya naṅkaḷ nātaṉē. (I–8–9)

Translation

Conch and discus, our Lord holds in His lovely hands
No matter where and in what form He descends.

Note

The Lord who thus incarnates, for my sake, through different gates of birth, always bears the inseparable Conch and Discus, like unto the potion carried by some to entice people. These may, however, be visible only to some Godly souls and not all. The Lord's descent could be likened to the Earthly Kings moving round their cities during nights, disguised in black clothes, to study men and matters at first hand, and locate miscreants operating under cover of darkness. The security forces or bodyguards also keep stirring about during those occasions, suitably masked, ready at hand, in an emergency call from the King. The Conch and Discus and other intimate attendants of the Lord, likewise, keep Him company during the Avatāras.

nātaṉ, ñālam koḷ pātaṉ eṉ ammāṉ,
ōtam pōl kiḷar vēta nīraṉē. (I–8–10)

Translation

The Sovereign Master (of the whole universe) whose feet
Measured all the worlds is my Sire upright fit, indeed
For the Vedas (vociferous like the ocean) to talk about.

Note

The Āḻvār, who was all along maintaining that the Supreme Lord's numerous incarnations were all for his sake, now says: " Who am I to voice forth the loving tenderness of the Lord, His uprightness which induced Him to incarnate so many times and in so many ways? None is more competent to talk about Him Who, as Trivikrama, set His feet on one and all without distinction of high and low, than the Vedas, vociferous like the oceanic waters, in singing His glorious traits ".

nīrpurai vaṇṇaṉ-cīr caṭakōpaṉ
nērtal āyirattu ōrtal ivaiyē. (I–8–11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the thousand
Sung by Caṭakōpaṉ reveal his view profound
That the Lord of water—tint
Is like water, pliable and transparent.

Note

The terminal stanza in each of the preceding decads set forth the good results flowing from the study or recital of the stanzas in that decad. This end-song is, however, silent in this regard; instead, it says that, in this decad, the Āḻvār has expressed his considered view, the one that is crystal-clear to him from the entire hymnal, namely, the Lord is transparent, progressive and pliable like water whose complexion He bears.

First Centum—Ninth Decad (I-9)
(Ivaiyum avaiyum)

Preamble

If the Lord's flow of grace unto the hitherto starved Soul were to be full and flooding, all of a sudden, the Subject cannot stand it and will just get swept off his feet. It is a matter of common knowledge how babes are fed through a graded course, beginning with breast milk, a little gruel some time later, and then, small bits of rice and so on. If, out of misplaced love, a parent fed the young one straightaway on adult scale–rice, curry and all that–the

result would be disastrous. As in the case of food, in the matter of imparting education also, one goes step by step. Little wonder then, the omniscient Lord regulates the influx of His grace in such a manner that the recipient is able to stomach it all right.

As is oft repeated in these pages, the Lord's grace is the sole means for attaining Him and yet, against the above background, the Āḻvār was not straightaway conferred the final bliss right at the beginning when he prayed to the Lord (opening song of Tiruviruttam) for the termination of existence in his foul body. The Āḻvār had to pass through a course of shock treatment, experiencing alternately the bliss of Divine presence and union and the cruel pangs of separation, whetting his appetite and enriching his Divine love and wisdom all the time. Before wearing a heavy ornament in the ear which is pretty delicate, one has to gradually prepare the ground by enlarging the ear-hole by stages, first inserting a small piece of string, then a thin metallic ring or chip and so on. Again, one who has been on a month's fast, either due to sickness or as a matter of penance, has to restart taking food only by stages, rice ground into a paste being smeared on the body, oral administration of gruel of low consistency, so on and so forth. The Lord, according to the Āḻvār's own admission in this decad as well as IV-5-5, unfolds unto the Āḻvār His glorious traits and deeds by stages, consistent with his capacity for in-take. (See aphorism 115 of Ācārya Hṛdayam). It would indeed be too much for the Āḻvār to bear if he were conferred, all at once, bliss enjoyed by the Eternal Angels in the Lord's close proximity in Heaven. No doubt, the Lord covets the Āḻvār's body, being the last of the series of bodies donned by him, in which the Lord has now been able to reclaim him. And yet He would not straightaway jump into the crown of his head, much as He would like to. If He did so, it would doubtless bring about the sudden collapse of the Āḻvār, like unto the pauper from birth, who suddenly comes by a sizable treasure, succumbing to the shock. He would first get near the Āḻvār, stand close to him, get into his hip, thence move upwards, to the region of his heart from there, step on to the shoulder, enter his tongue, peep through his eyes, pause for a while on the forehead and then reach the head, His ultimate destination. It is this trait of a well-regulated flow of the Lord's grace that the Āḻvār admires and brings out in this decad.

ivaiyum avaiyum uvaiyum ivarum avarum uvarum
evaiyum evarum taṉṉuḷē ākiyum ākkiyum kākkum
avaiyuḷ taṉimutal emmāṉ, kaṇṇa-pirāṉ, eṉ amutam,
cuvaiyaṉ: tiruviṉ maṇāḷaṉ eṉṉuṭaic cūḻal uḷāṉē. (I–9–1)

Translation

Around me is my Liege-Lord, my ambrosia,
The great Lover, Tiru's (Mahālakṣmī's) Consort, Kaṇṇaṉ,
The sole cause and Internal Controller, pervading all beings all over,
(Both Sentient and non-sentient) and sustaining them all within Him.

cūḻal palapala vallāṉ; tollai am kālattu ulakaik
kēḻal oṉṟu āki iṭanta kēcavaṉ eṉṉuṭai ammāṉ;
vēḻa-maruppai ocittāṉ; viṇṇavarkku eṇṇal ariyāṉ;
āḻa neṭuṅ kaṭal cērntāṉ: avaṉ eṉ arukalilāṉē. (I–9–2)

Translation

Near me is my Lord of many descents, Who, as a peerless Boar,
Once retrieved the Earth from the ocean; Killed He a tusker,
As Kēcavaṉ, smashing its tusks; much beyond the comprehension
Of Viṇṇavar (Devas), He reclined on the deep and vast ocean.

Note

There are two different episodes about the Earth having been picked out of the ocean.

(a) Hiraṇyākṣa, the demon with golden eyes, had rolled up the Earth like a mat, tucked under his arm-pit and then hid himself inside the oceanic waters. Lord Viṣṇu, at the request of the Devas, incarnated as a Boar with a gigantic tusk, bent and protruding, chased the demon under the waters and forked the Earth out on the unique tusk.

(b) At the end of the last epoch, Known as 'Pādma Kalpa' (the current one is Sveta Varāha Kalpa) Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa assumed the form of the Primordial Boar

with the unique tusk, long and bent, and retrieved the Earth which had gone inside the watery expanse of the deluge.

arukal ilāya perum cīr amararkaḷ āti-mutalvan̲;
karukiya nīla nan̲ mēn̲i vaṇṇan̲; centāmaraik kaṇṇan̲;
poru–cir̲aip puḷ uvantu ēr̲um pūmakaḷār tan̲ik kēḷvan̲;
orukatiyin̲ cuvai tantiṭṭu, oḷivu ilan̲ en̲n̲ōṭu uṭan̲ē. (I–9–3)

Translation

Of auspicious qualities, undiminishing and eternal,
Of sapphire hue, the Primal Lord of the Celestials,
Of red-lotus eyes, with the bird (Garuḍa) as His vehicle, of hefty wings
Pūmakaḷār's (lotus-born Lakṣmī's peerless Consort stays)
Inside me, regaling me in a number of ways.

Note

It is a rich and varied fare that the Lord serves to the **Āḷvār**, having taken possession of him and shifted unto his body which now constitutes the seat of His entire cosmic activities. The Lord exhibits:

(a) His auspicious qualities, eternal and unlimited;

(b) His Overlordship of the Celestials in Heaven;

(c) His exquisite form of sapphire hue;

(d) His bewitching looks emanating from the red–lotus eyes, full of grace;

(e) Garuḍā, His mighty vehicle, with tough plumes;

(f) His Lordship of ' Śrī ', the Divine Mother, the Goddess of affluence.

These correspond to the six rasas (appetisers) which enter our dishes, forming a well-integrated meal.

uṭan̲ amar kātal makaḷir tirumakaḷ maṇmakaḷ āyar
maṭa makaḷ en̲r̲u ivar mūvar; āḷum ulakamum mūn̲r̲ē;
uṭan̲ avai okka viḻuṅki, ālilaic cērntavan̲ emmān̲,
kaṭal mali māyap perumān̲, kaṇṇan̲ en̲ okkalaiyān̲ē. (I–9–4)

Translation

My Lord's favourite spouses three
Are Tirumakaḷ, Maṇmakaḷ, Āyarmaṭamakaḷ; the worlds three
He rules over, He ate them up simultaneously
And on a fig-leaf, during deluge, lay;
Of wondrous deeds and glory, bigger than ocean,
Kaṇṇan̲, my Liege-Lord is on my hip seated now.

Notes

(i) The Universal Lord sits on the hip of the Āḷvār even as He sat on the hip of Yaśōda, during His Avatāra, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

(ii) The three worlds referred to are the Svarga, up above, the Underworld, down below (Pāthāla) and the Earth, in between. The three Spouses of the Lord in His transcendental setting are: Śrī (Tirumakaḷ), Bhū (Maṇmakaḷ) and Nīla (Āyar maṭa makaḷ).

okkalai vaittu mulaippāl uṇ en̲r̲u tantiṭa vāṅkic
cekkam ceka an̲r̲u avaḷpāl uyir ceka uṇṭa perumān̲;
nakka pirān̲ōṭu ayan̲um intiran̲um mutalāka
okkavum tōr̲r̲iya īcan̲ māyan̲ en̲ neñcin̲ uḷān̲ē. (I–9–5)

Translation

The Supreme Lord Who created one and all–
Ayan̲ (Brahmā), Nakkapirān̲ (Rudra), Intiran̲ (Indra) and others of wondrous traits
And deeds–Who, sitting on the hip of that devil,
(Pūtanā), Sucked her breast and life alike, stays now in my heart.

māyan̲ en̲ neñcin̲ uḷḷān̲, mar̲r̲um evarkkum atuvē;
kāyamum cīvan̲um tān̲ē; kālum eriyum avan̲ē;
cēyan̲, aṇiyan̲, evarkkum cintaikkum kōcaram allan̲;
tūyan̲ tuyakkan̲ mayakkan̲ en̲n̲uṭait tōḷiṇaiyān̲ē. (I–9–6)

Translation

Ha! right in my heart is Māyan̲ (the wonderful Lord),
As in the case of none else; body and soul, wind and fire,

He at once is; near (unto some) and yet far (unto others),
Beyond mental reach of one and all is my impeccable Lord,
(Unto the unfortunate sceptics), elusive and confounding,
He is now on my shoulders firmly mounted.

Notes

(i) The Supreme Lord controls the bodies of the different species of beings and the Souls inside them, the elements and all. Easily accessible to the devout who depend solely on His voluntary grace, He is beyond the comprehension of those who seek to know Him through their own efforts. Of easy grasp by the recipients of His grace, He is elusive unto others, who, by dint of their Kārmik influence, either doubt His very existence or comprehend Him the wrong way, as one on a par with other minor deities, as one without form and attributes, so on and so forth.

(ii) Speaking about clarity and confusion, precision and prevarication, in the above context, it is worth mentioning the following incident by way of illustrating that devotion and conviction go hand in hand and where devotion is wanting, there doubt, ignorance and bewilderment prevail.

(iii) Among the many listeners of Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar's scintillating discourses, there was a learned Pandit whom Bhaṭṭar, however, treated with no more than the barest ordinary courtesy. On the other hand, there was an aged Śrī Vaiṣṇava without any academic learning, whom Bhaṭṭar received with great respect and attention. A third party who felt puzzled over this marked disparity in treatment, and that too, in the reverse order, reverently approached Bhaṭṭar and prayed for clarification. Bhaṭṭar coolly replied, "You may come tomorrow as usual and watch. The parties in question will also come and I will tell you what it is". The morning came, the Pandit first came and paid obeisance to Bhaṭṭar who, however, received him as usual with ordinary politeness; the third party was also with them by now, when Bhaṭṭar asked the learned Pandit: "Whom have you settled in your mind as the 'Paratattva' (ultimate Truth)?" The Pandit went about it, in a ponderous manner, full of doubts and uncertainty, quoting certain texts in favour of the Supremacy of Brahmā (who is but the demi-urge, the appointed agent for creation), some in favour of the overlordship of the All-pervading Viṣṇu and some others, establishing the Sovereign sway of Rudra (the appointed agent for destruction). Ultimately, he wound up by betraying his helplessness that, in the face of these conflicting texts, it would not be possible to arrive at any conclusion. At this stage, the aforesaid elderly person also arrived. Receiving him with great reverence, Bhaṭṭar asked: "Pray, who to you is the Ultimate Truth?" Pat came the reply, with pin-point precision: "I know of none other than Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, whom you discourse about, all these days; I also know of no other truth than what you preach to us daily, namely, Śrī Rāmānuja is my sole Saviour, the Means as well as the End of my salvation". Turning to the questioner of the previous day (third party) Bhaṭṭar said "I do hope You are now convinced that my attention to the elderly person is not misplaced. Now say, to whom I should bend". Need it be added that the questioner was fully satisfied?

tōḷ-iṇai mēlum, naṉ mārpiṉ mēlum, cuṭar-muṭi mēlum,
tāḷ-iṇai mēlum, puṉainta taṇ am tuḻāy uṭai ammāṉ,
kēḷ-iṇai oṉṟum ilātāṉ; kiḷarum cuṭar-oḷi mūrtti;
nāḷ aṇaintu oṉṟum akalāṉ; eṉṉuṭai nāviṉ uḷāṉē. (I–9–7)

Translation

With His shoulders, winsome chest, the lustrous crown
And feet, by tulacī, cool and nice, gaily adorned,

The peerless Lord of mounting radiance and glowing renown,
Tightens His hold on me, day by day, and now rests He in my tongue.

Notes

(i) Even as the wife bedecks and beautifies herself to excite the special fascination of her husband, the Lord bedecks Himself with tulacī, which holds out special fascination for the Āḻvār and mingles with him.

(ii) The sequence of decoration indicated in the stanza is appreciated by Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar in his own inimitable way, as follows:

It is but meet, the great Warrior that the Lord is, He decorates first of all His sinewy shoulders bearing His weapons, namely, Conch and Discus; next comes the winsome chest, the seat of the Divine Mother, needing decoration for Her exhilaration; the crown comes thereafter only and the rest goes to the Lord's feet, always coveted by the devotees, where their salvation lies.

(iii) *Peerless Lord*: That the Lord is of incomparable excellence is brought out succinctly, later on, in III-1-2, the comparisons with lotus, gold etc, touching only a fringe of the subject. The things with which the Lord is compared actually suffer in comparison and lag far behind Him, rather pale into insignificance.

nāviṉuḷ niṉṟu malarum ñāṉak kalaikaḷukku ellām
āviyum ākkaiyum tāṉē; aḻippōtu aḷippavaṉ tāṉē;
pū iyal nāl-taṭam tōḷaṉ; poru paṭai āḻi caṅku ēntum
kāvi naṉ mēṉik kamalak kaṇṇaṉ; eṉ kaṇṇiṉ uḷāṉē. (I–9–8)

Translation

The arts, one and all, blossoming from the tongue,
Their body (sound) and soul (meaning),
Their exit and entrance are by Him Controlled,
Conch and Discus, His lovely shoulders four do sport,
The lotus-eyed of bewitching charm has my eyes entered.

Notes

(i) Certain branches of knowledge become extinct due to lack of propagation, due again to lack of interest or adequate intelligence to grasp them and various other causes; the Lord allows them to die out and gets them resuscitated, as and when He deems it necessary.

(ii) C.f. IV-2 and 3 of Bhagavad Gītā where Lord Kṛṣṇa says that the Karma Yoga, explained by Him long back to Vivaswat, by him to Manu,and by Manu to Ikṣvāku, was lost through long lapse of time and the same Yoga was again being taught by the Lord to Arjuna (at the appropriate time).

kamalak kaṇṇaṉ, eṉ kaṇṇiṉ uḷḷāṉ, kāṇpaṉ avaṉ kaṇkaḷālē;
amalaṅkaḷ āka viḻikkum; aimpulaṉum avaṉ mūrtti;
kamalattu ayaṉ nampi-taṉṉaik kaṇṇutalāṉoṭum tōṟṟi,
amalat teyvattoṭu ulakam ākki, eṉ neṟṟi uḷāṉē. (I–9–9)

Translation

The lotus-eyed Lord, right in my eyes,
Could by me be seen through His eyes,
Which destroyed my nescience and made.
All my senses five subserve Him; He made
The lotus-based Ayaṉ (Brahmā), Rudra, on whose forehead
Is an extra eye, other Devas and rest of the worlds,
(He of such eminence) is now right on my forehead.

Note

The Lord, hitherto not visible, could now be seen in all His grandeur and enjoyed by the Āḻvār, not only through his eyes but all his other senses as well. This was possible only due to the Lord's redemptive grace, shed in super-abundance through His benevolent looks. Finding that the Āḻvār could assimilate this grand experience, the Lord next passed

on to the Āḻvār's forehead on the penultimate lap of His Journey to the Āḻvār's crown.

neṟṟiyuḷ niṉṟu eṉṉai āḷum nirai malarp-pātaṅkaḷ cūṭik
kaṟṟait tuḷāy muṭik kōlak kaṇṇa-pirāṉait toḻuvār
oṟṟaip piṟai aṇintāṉum nāṉmukaṉum intiraṉum
maṟṟai amararum ellām; vantu eṉatu ucciyuḷāṉē. (I–9–10)

Translation

The lotus feet of the Lord, wearing round bands of tuḷacī dense,
Resting on my forehead, are worshipped and worn on their heads,
By the wearer of crescent Moon (Śiva), Nāṉmukaṉ (Brahmā), Intiraṉ (Indra)
And all other Amarar (Devas); Such an eminent One
Shot up from my forehead, right into my head.

Notes

(i) Even the exalted Śiva, Brahmā, Indra and other Devas have to queue up, seeking the appropriate time for the propitiation of the Lord. But He, in turn, has got into the Āḻvār's head, seeking the most appropriate time for it.

(ii) In the first line of this stanza (original text) reference has been made to the Lord's pair of lotus feet, planted on the Āḻvār's forehead, and these feet were worshipped by Śiva, Brahmā, Indra and other Devas and borne on their heads. This points to the insignia or the caste-mark worn by Śrī Vaiṣṇavites and from the wording of the stanza, it could be assumed that the Āḻvār bore, on his forehead, the Lord's pair of feet with a lotus base and not a single foot alone, as a section of Śrī Vaiṣṇavites has chosen to depict.

ucciyuḷḷē niṟkum tēva tēvaṟkuk kaṇṇa-pirāṉukku
iccaiyuḷ cella uṇartti, vaṇ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
ic coṉṉa ayirattuḷḷē ivaiyum ōr pattu empirāṟku
niccalum viṇṇappam ceyya nīḷ kaḻal ceṉṉi porumē. (I–9–11)

Translation

The Lord's longish feet will for ever crown
The heads of those who (but once) recite these songs ten,
Out of the thousand sung by Caṭakōpaṉ of Kurukūr, narrating
Just as he experienced, how Kaṇṇapirāṉ, the Supreme Lord, migrated from one limb of his to another and alighted on his crown.

Note

The Supreme Lord, adorning the heads of the exalted Devas, coveted the Āḻvār's head so much that He got into it by stages, and there being no higher place to step into, the Lord stays on there. In other words, the Āḻvār's head is the new abode of the Lord. This is indeed the limit for the Lord's loving condescension (Sauśīlya)! Here then is the mystic realisation that God loves His Subjects in the same way they pine for union with Him.

First Centum—Tenth Decad (I-10)
(Poru mā nīḷ paṭai)

Preamble

In this decad, the Lord's voluntary or spontaneous grace is prominently brought out and extolled by the Āḻvār. Some Ācāryas, however, hold that the Āḻvār gives vent to his boundless joy resulting from the Lord's contact with him, limb by limb, mentioned in the preceding decad. The remarkable approach of Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, that intellectual giant of extraordinary divine fervour to this decad is as follows:

In the preceding decad, the Supreme Lord was shown to have finally got on to the Āḻvār's head. Could there be any mystic experience more exalted than this? It was now up to the Lord to keep it up without once again snatching Himself away from the Āḻvār. That apart, the highest bliss, thus conferred by the Lord on the Āḻvār, led him on, to an introspection as to how he came by it. A thread-bare analysis of his own attainments reveals that he has none whatsoever and, at best, it could be said that he was God-bent

and free from hatred for Him. Can it be said that a lemon fruit has secured a Kingdom, simply because a subject reverently placed a lemon fruit at the feet of a munificent King and got a liberal gift of territory, at the King's pleasure? It is absolutely impossible, rather, it would be preposterous to correlate the slender means of the Individual, as good as non-existent, with the 'End', of mighty dimensions, as in the example cited above. Verily, the Lord is the root-cause even for the little merit, if any, acquired by the Individual, down the ages, as the latter was dowered with body and limbs, and put on a career of useful activity, only by Him. And so, the present ecstatic experience of the Āḻvār is traceable only to the Lord's redemptive grace and, little wonder, the Āḻvār thaws down in grateful acknowledgement of the Lord's benefaction, totally unrelated to the merit in him.

It will be seen from the above exposition that Bhaṭṭar lays emphasis on the Lord's redemptive grace besides sharing the view of the other Ācāryas, so far as the Āḻvār's ecstatic experience is concerned.

poru mā nīḷ paṭai āḻi caṅkattoṭu
tiru mā nīḷ kaḻal ēḻ ulakum toḻa,
oru māṇik kuṟaḷ āki, nimirnta ak
karu māṇikkam eṉ kaṇṇuḷatu ākumē. (I–10–1)

Translation

The peerless Vamāna bearing the martial conch and discus,
The majestic weapons, Whose feet, long and lovely,
All the seven worlds worshipped, as He grew into space,
That blue-gem of a Lord is unto me visible!

Note

Even in his dreams, Mahābali had not conjured up the vision of the charming Lord presenting Himself before him, in all His grandeur and asking for a gift. Likewise, the Āḻvār had not the remotest idea that the Lord would ever come to him and reveal His exquisite charm to his naked eyes. No wonder then, he goes into raptures over the Lord's spontaneous grace. This is indeed the key stanza for this decad.

kaṇṇuḷḷē niṟkum-kātaṉmaiyāl toḻil–
eṇṇilum varum; eṉ iṉi vēṇṭuvam-
maṇṇum nīrum eriyum nal vāyuvum
viṇṇumāy viriyum em pirāṉaiyē? (I–10–2)

Translation

My Lord hath as His body the elements five
And as the sprawling Universe expands; worshipped with love
He makes Himself visible, nay, for the mere count.
What more does one (for salvation) want?

Notes

(i) It is by no means surprising that the Lord Who is bound by the deep love of the devotees, always keeps Himself in their vicinity. But the Āḻvār now touches upon the Lord's overwhelming generosity in presenting Himself even to those who utter the number twentysix, in the course of casual enumeration. The non-sentient body has 24 ingredients, such as Mind, senses, tanmātrās etc; the sentient soul which takes possession of the body and directs it, is the 25th tattva (principle) and the Lord is the 26th tattva, controlling, as He does, both the body and the Soul which constitute, as it were, His bodies. This explains the significance of number 26, denoting the Lord.

(ii) The Āḻvār exclaims: "When the Lord can be got at even by casual enumeration, what more do we need for our salvation?" By this, he means that God's grace is the sole means of salvation and nothing is needed on our part. There are no special conditions supporting His grace which operates unasked and unaided. What is wanted is non-resistance or non-rejection when Grace is offered. When it was pointed out to the great Ācārya, Nampiḷḷai, by one of his disciples, named, Vēlveṭṭippiḷḷai that Śrī Rāma offered Śaraṇāgati to the king of the oceans, facing east and observing other ritualistic formalities, the learned Preceptor elucidated that it was done so by Śrī Rāma as a matter of course, in keeping with his orthodox

background and not as something mandatory. As a matter of fact, Śrī Rāma resorted to the said 'Śaraṇāgati' only on the advice of Vibhīṣaṇa who, however, did not have a single dip in the ocean before he sought asylum at the feet of Śrī Rāma. The lesson to be learnt from this contrasting picture is that 'Śaraṇāgati' (surrender to the Lord's loving grace) could be performed in any manner, with or without a bath, the one who hasn't had his bath already, not being under any compulsion to take a bath and, conversely, the one who has had his bath already, need not defile himself by way of emulating the former.

em pirāṉai, entai tantai tantaikkum
tampirāṉai, taṉ-tāmaraik kaṇṇaṉai,
kompu arāvu nuṇ nēr iṭai mārpaṉai,
em pirāṉait toḻāy, maṭa neñcamē. (I–10–3)

Translation

My docile mind! bow unto the Benefactor great
Of our entire clan, the lotus-eyed Lord,
Shedding cool grace, bearing on His winsome chest,
The Mother Divine, lovely and thin-waisted.

Note

The Lord's tender solicitude for the devotees, overlooking their countless transgressions, springs from His close contact with the Divine Mother who is the very personification of grace.

neñcamē! nallai! nallai! uṉṉaip peṟṟāl
eṉ ceyyōm? iṉi eṉṉa kuṟaivinam?
maintaṉai malarāḷ maṇavāḷaṉait
tuñcumpōtum viṭātu toṭar kaṇṭāy. (I–10–4)

Translation

Well done, my mind! what is there
We can't secure when you are here?
Well, is there anything we would want anymore?

Malarāḷ's (Lotus-born Lakṣmī's) Consort, ever young,
Leave not, even if you find me straying.

Note

The Āḻvār's mind exhorted by him in the preceding stanza to worship the Lord, responded so well that he now pats it on its back and prays that it shall cling to the Lord under all circumstances. The Āḻvār apprehends the off-chance of his shrinking back from the Lord once again, when his own humility haunts him, in dire contrast to the Lord's overwhelming superiority. Right now, the Āḻvār counsels his mind, never to get parted from the Lord, whatever might be his own vicissitudes.

kaṇṭāyē, neñcē! karumaṅkaḷ vāykkiṉṟu ōr
eṉ tāṉum iṉṟiyē vantu iyalumāṟu;
uṇṭāṉai ulaku ēḻum ōr mūvaṭi
koṇṭāṉaik kaṇṭukoṇṭaṉai nīyumē. (I–10–5)

Translation

Haven't you seen, my mind! how things occur,
With no pre-thoughts in us? did the worlds seven
Know that the Lord would, during deluge, sustain
Them all? Who knew that the Lord would measure
The worlds in three strides and set His feet on them?
Well, did you ever know that you would see Him?

Note

The Lord extends His grace out of His own sweet will, unasked and un-premeditated by us. It is this spontaneous grace of the Lord that Bhaṭṭar has emphasised all along in this decad.

nīyum nāṉum in nērniṟkil, mēl maṟṟōr
nōyum cārkoṭāṉ; neñcamē! coṉṉēṉ:
tāyum tantaiyum āy, iv ulakiṉil
vāyum īcaṉ, maṇivaṇṇaṉ entaiyē. (I–10–6)

Translation

My mind! if you and I continue in this state,
Our sapphire—hued Lord, Master of all,
Who is our Father and Mother as well,
Will rid us of all ills, let me truly state.

Note

Addressing his mind, the Āḷvār says: " Our eternal Lord Who endears Himself to us like the Mother, whose love is proverbial, chastises like the Father, bent upon reforming us, revealed His resplendent form like unto a sapphire and enthralled me. If you and I persevere in this state, the Lord will see to it that we enjoy this perennial bliss for all time, keeping away all ills and evils ".

entaiyē! eṉṟum, em perumāṉ! eṉṟum,
cintaiyuḷ vaippaṉ, colluvaṉ, pāviyēṉ-
entai! em perumāṉ! eṉṟu vāṉavar
cintaiyuḷ vaittuc collum celvaṉaiyē. (I–10–7)

Translation

The Sovereign Lord, the Celestials contemplate
And sing His glory as their Progenitor (Primate);
How dare I, a sinner, likewise meditate
And call Him my Father, my Master and all that?

Note

The Scriptures warn that one shall not utter anything ominous (inauspicious), lest it should actually come to pass. In the fourth stanza of this decad, the Āḷvār, while exhorting his mind, apprehended the frightful possibility of his moving away from the Lord, haunted by his own lowliness. And here we find him suffering from that obsession again and so soon!

celva nāraṇaṉ eṉṟa col kēṭṭalum,
malkum kaṇ paṉi; nāṭuvaṉ, māyamē!
allum naṉ pakalum iṭaivīṭu iṉṟi
nalki, eṉṉai viṭāṉ, nampi nampiyē. (I–10–8)

Translation

' Celvanāraṇaṉ, ' the word uttered by some one,
Heard I, and lo! with tears my eyes did run;
Searched I whither He is gone, oh, what a marvel!
Thro' friendly days and nights with no interval,
The perfect Lord, full of grace, tries to win
My love and elects with me ever to remain.

Note

" How unworthy and unbecoming, " the Āḷvār rattled, "would be the union of one so vile and abject like me and the Supreme Lord, pure and exalted beyond words! " And so, he fled away and hid himself behind a ruined wall, in a remote corner, with little or no scope of hearing and talking about God-head. Thus he would forget all about God and, as a further precaution against possible detection and intrusion on his privacy, he even put a veil over his head. But what happened? A wayfarer, with a heavy headload, rested a while there, after unburdening himself. While discharging the load, he ejaculated ' Śrīman Nārāyaṇa ' ! in a relaxing mood. The moment this magic word struck the ears of the Āḷvār, he got himself transformed into the ecstatic state, described in this stanza, as above. The Saint was indeed most agreeably surprised that the Lord should shed on him His grace and affection in such super-abundance and reclaim him despite his determination to forget all about Him, for fear of tainting Him. Oh, what a grip the Lord has over His chosen subjects!

nampiyai, teṉ kuṟuṅkuṭi niṉṟa, ac
cempoṉē tikaḻum tiru mūrttiyai,
umpar vāṉavar āti am cōtiyai,
em pirāṉai, eṉ colli maṟappanō ? (I–10–9)

Translation

On what pretext shall I forget my Lord of dazzling charm,
The Progenitor of the exalted denizens of heaven,

The perfect Lord Who, in Tentirukkuṟuṅkuṭi stands
With an exquisite Form that does like red gold gleam?

Notes

(i) Asked whether he would not forget the Lord like the worldlings and go in pursuit of food and raiment, the Āḷvār says, he just does not know how and on what grounds he can forget the Lord. By exhibiting His exquisite charm in His Arcā form at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi (deep down, in Tamil Nadu), He enthralled the Āḷvār. How then could he forget Him? Could it be on the ground that He is not perfect, that He is not near at hand, that His form is not attractive, that He is not exalted, that He does not extend any benefits? No, none of these grounds will hold good, as could be seen from this stanza.

(ii) The Lord, in His Arcā (Iconic) form in Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi, is referred to as the perfect one in whom all the auspicious qualities converge in a perfect measure. No doubt, the qualities of saulabhya (easy accessibility), Sauśīlya (condescension), Vātsalya (tender solicitude) etc. are also displayed by the Lord in His 'Para' or transcendent form in the High Heavens. But, in that land of perfect bliss and perpetual splendour, these qualities can be hardly perceptible in such a marked degree as they are in this land of darkness, delusion and despair. There is all the difference between a light burning in broad day light and the one shining forth in a dark room. (Īṭu)

maṟappum ñāṉamum nāṉ oṉṟu uṇarntilaṉ;
maṟakkum eṉṟu centāmaraik kaṇṇoṭu,
maṟappu aṟa, eṉ uḷḷē maṉṉiṉāṉ taṉṉai
maṟappaṉō, iṉi yāṉ eṉ maṇiyaiyē? (I–10–10)

Translation

I know not what it is to feel or forget
And yet, the Lord, with red-lotus-eyes, does apprehend

That I'll forget Him and, as one forewarned,
He has lodged Himself firm in my heart;
The gem of a Lord, shall I any more forget?

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār feels that he is incapable of thinking and there is, therefore, no question of his forgetting either. The Lord is, however, anxious that the knowledge now dawned on the Āḷvār as a result of His union with him, should remain intact, leaving no more scope for his sliding down or slipping off. He has, therefore, lodged Himself firmly inside the Āḷvār, casting His benevolent glances on him.

(ii) Who will cast away a priceless gem when it comes to one's hand, instead of treasuring it and enjoying it all the time?

maṇiyai, vāṉavar kaṇṇaṉai, taṉṉatu ōr
aṇiyai, teṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col-
paṇi cey āyirattuḷ ivai pattuṭaṉ
taṇivilar kaṟparēl, kalvi vāyumē. (I–10–11)

Translation

Those that learn with zeal and thirst insatiable these songs ten,
Out of the thousand sung by Tenkurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
As a matter of service unto the Lord of sapphire hue,
Himself a jewel unique, overlord of the Celestials,
Will with knowledge divine be filled.

Notes

(i) In accordance with the text of the song, those that learn these ten songs will have their fill of knowledge. The ultimate aim of knowledge is Divine Service and so, this knowledge should blossom into service.

(ii) The blue-gem is likened to the Lord in a number of ways. In it, there is a happy blending, as in the case of the supreme Lord, of 'Paratva' and 'Saulabhya', the two extremes of paramountcy and simplicity. With all its high intrinsic value, the gem can be easily carried, tied at one end of the garment".

(iii) It is common knowledge that jewels beautify the wearer. In the case of the Lord, however, He beautifies the jewels worn by Him and He is Himself the most attractive of all jewels.

THE CENTUM, IN RETROSPECT (DECAD-WISE SUMMARY)

(I-1): Right in the opening line of the first song of the first decad, Saint Nammāḻvār characterises God as one with perfections, all of the nature of inexhaustible bliss and love, the natural repository of innumerable auspicious traits of unlimited dimensions. The Āḻvār gratefully revels in the blissful knowledge of the Supreme Lord, shorn of all doubts, discrepancies and deviations, dowered on him by the Lord Himself, in the exercise of His spontaneous grace and exhorts his mind to take refuge in the Lord's distress-dispelling, dazzling feet, being the sure and certain means of salvation. The Lord's greatness and transcedent glory, elucidated in the *opening decad* have been briefly set out below. He is at once the Material Cause as well as the Operative Cause and Instrumental Cause of all life and being; He is the one and only Giver either directly or through other minor deities, whose favours their respective votaries seek; He is all-pervading like the Soul inside the body;

(I-2): Far from being selfish and self-centred, the Āḻvār wishes to share with his fellow beings, wallowing in the stye of wordly life, all that knowledge graciously dowered on him by the Lord. He, therefore, exhorts them, *in the second decad*, to give up the elusive and obnoxious pleasures of worldly life, disengage themselves from the erroneous notions of 'I' and 'Mine' and dedicate themselves to the appreciation of the limitless wealth and splendour of the Supreme Lord, thereby reaping the rich harvest of eternal bliss and beatitude. True renunciation is of the mind, as distinguished from mere bodily replacements, such as living a secluded life in a remote forest. In this, his first address to the fellow-beings, the Āḻvār also teaches them how and where to pray, by giving out the substance of the eight-syllabled 'Tirumantra'—Aum Namo (Nārāyaṇāya);

(I-3): Lest his addressees in the preceding decad be scared of the Lord's sovereignty as the Supreme Master of the whole universe, the Āḻvār puts them at ease by depicting, *in the third decad*, the Lord's disarming simplicity and His easy-accessibility (Saulabhya) and emphasising that, to those who turn their minds unto Him, He is easily accessible but difficult of attainment by others;

(I-4): *In the fourth decad*, the Āḻvār is seen transformed (figuratively of course) as a 'Nāyakī' (female lover) pining for immediate union with the Supreme Lord and sending some birds, as her emissaries, to the Lord reclining on the 'Milk-ocean', the seat of the Lord's creative activity, invoking His trait of forgiveness (aparāda sahatva). (The winged birds typify the efficient preceptors, possessed of the mighty wings of knowledge (Jñāna) and conduct (anuṣṭāna), a happy blending of both. (This is the first of four such decads in the entire hymnal, the other three being VI-1, VI-8 and IX-7.)

(I-5): The Saint brings into focus, the Lord's trait of loving condescension (Sauśīlya) or mixing freely with the lowliest, *in the fifth decad;* the Lord, bent

upon having a rapport with the Āḷvār, shakes off the latter's inferiority complex inducing him, quite often, to retreat from the Lord for fear of defiling One, so exalted.

(I-6): The Lord's 'Svārādhatva' (easy worshippability) is emphasised *in the sixth decad;* the outward offerings may be trifles but, in God's eyes, they carry much weight, when offered in humility, with loving devotion;

(I-7): Easy-worshippability apart, the Lord is highly adorable because of His extraordinary sweetness; this is highlighted by the Āḷvār, *in the seventh decad;*

(I-8): *In the eighth decad*, the Āḷvār brings to the fore, the Lord's trait of uprightness (ārjava or rujuḥ) His transparence in word, deed and thought, free from sophistry, duplicity, mental reservation, mischievous distortion, etc.;

(I-9): The Omniscient Lord regulates the influx of His grace in such a manner that the recipient is able to stomach it all right. *In the ninth decad*, as well as the fifth decad of the fourth centum, according to the Āḷvār's own admission, the Lord unfolds unto him, His glorious traits and wondrous deeds, only by stages, consistent with his capacity for in-take (Sātmia bhoga pradatva). Being the last of the staggering series of bodies donned by the Āḷvār, in which alone the Lord could reclaim him, He naturally covets his body. And yet, He would not jump straightaway into the crown of the Āḷvār's head; He would first stand close to him, get into his hip and thence move upwards, limb by limb. Had the Lord not adopted this process of gradual occupation of the Āḷvār's body, the latter would have just collapsed, like unto a pauper from birth, who suddenly comes by a sizeable treasure;

(I-10): *In the concluding) decad of this centum*, the Lord's voluntary or spontaneous grace (nirhetuka kṛpā) is brought out prominently and extolled by the Āḷvār who also gives vent to his boundless joy resulting from the Lord's contact with him, limb by limb, as set out in the ninth decad.

BOOK II

Second Centum—First Decad (II-1)
(Vāyum tirai)

Preamble

In the last stanza of the preceding decad, the Āḷvār who had already conjured up the vision of the Lord as having entered his body and gone right up to his head, referred to the Lord as the blue gem, overlord of the Celestials and a very attractive jewel, by himself. Each one of these features of the Lord was so fascinating that the Āḷvār could not resist the immediate urge to enjoy them outwardly. The enjoyment, longed for, did not, however, materialise instantly and the Āḷvār was thrown into a state of deep dejection, reduced to the abject position of a forlorn lover. The Āḷvār, thus transformed into a female lover (Parāṇkuśa Nāyakī), pining for her beloved Lord, moves into a garden on the sea-shore to bemoan her separation. It may be recalled that she was in a similar predicament earlier, when she sent the birds etc, as her emissaries to the Lord—See I-4. But then, she is worse off now, not finding any one to carry her message to the Lord. The self-same stork which she had commissioned earlier now looms in her eyes as a comrade-in-distress. The stork's natural complexion is white but the Āḷvār thinks that it is a case of decoloration due to the pangs of separation from the Lord, experienced by it. The Aṉṟil birds of opposite sex always stay together and even during sleep keep their bills locked in each other's mouth. The moment the bills get unlocked, they wake up and start crying. Unaware of this natural sequence, Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī thinks that these birds cry out their agony of separation from the Lord, like her. The wind, ever on the move, appears to the Āḷvār to go about frantically in search of the Lord; the clouds, unleashing rain-water, look like shedding tears of grief due to separation from the Lord; likewise, the waning of the Moon, the surging, up and down, of the waves, the burning of the lamp and all other natural phenomena are invested by the love-lorn Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī with her own poignancy and she bemoans their lot as well. This sets the pace and pattern of this decad, pin pointing the Lord's quality of making his devotees mad with God-love.

Here is an interesting comparison: Lakṣmaṇa, while pleading that he should be allowed to accompany Śrī Rāma into exile, cited the example of the fish failing to survive without water, thereby indicating that Śrī Rāma was unto Lakṣmaṇa what water is unto fish. But here is Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī who feels that the fish, water and all things subsist on the Lord and cannot brook separation from Him! The Āḻvār addresses these Comrades-in-distress commiserating with them in their sad plight. It is worth noting that Śloka 15 and the following few ślokas in the last chapter of the tenth skanda of Bhāgavatam run in a similar vein.

vāyum tirai ukaḷum kāṉal maṭa nārāy!
āyum, amar-ulakum tuñcilum nī tuñcāyāl;
nōyum payalaimaiyum mītu-ūra emmēpōl,
nīyum tirumālāl neñcam kōḷ-paṭṭāyē? (II–1–1)

Translation

Sleep you don't, You young stork in the sea-shore garden!
Though my mother and Heavens too have into slumber gone;
The whole of your body is white with grief great;
Like me, have you unto Tirumāl lost your heart?

Notes

(i) Not falling within the mischief of 'tamas' (inertia), there is no question of the Heavens going into slumber. The wonder of it is that even the Heavens, never known to sleep, have gone to sleep, but the poor stork doesn't sleep! The (gnostic) mother would not sleep because there was a time when she was agitating her mind about finding a suitable match for her highly evolved daughter (Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī), and now again, the mother cannot sleep when the daughter is in such a state of mental agony, separated from her Lord. Even such a mother has gone to sleep but the stork wouldn't sleep. Surely, its affliction must be very heavy.

(ii) The Āḻvār thinks that decoloration has set in throughout the body of the stork like the fast-spreading poison, and that is why it is white all over. About the decoloration of the lover due to the gloom of separation, see notes below I-4-4.

(iii) The soul can neither be split nor burnt, neither wetted nor dried up, and yet the Āḻvār has, in several places, referred to his getting split, burnt, wetted and dried up; the inanimate mind is raised by him to the status of an animate being and he extols it and denounces it alternately, according to its tempo and behaviour; each sense-organ, each faculty, is made to acquire an independent stature of its own, as if it is a separate animate entity by itself and these compete with each other in the matter of God-enjoyment, exceeding and even transcending their functional limitations (III-8); God-love, engendered in the Āḻvār also acquires a similar stature and is said to thaw down like ice. And now, the Āḻvār sees the very elements, water, wind and fire, as comrades-in-distress, and weeps along with them, bespeaking the intensity of his God-thirst, not conforming to the conventional norms of thinking and behaviour. (aphorism 132 of Ācārya Hṛdayaṁ).

kōḷ-paṭṭa cintaiyaiyāyk kūrvāya aṉṟilē!
cēṇ-paṭṭa yāmaṅkaḷ cērātu iraṅkutiyāl;
āḷ-paṭṭa emmēpōl nīyum aravu-aṇaiyāṉ
tāḷ-paṭṭa taṇ-tulāyt tāmam kāmuṟṟāyē? (II–1–2)

Translation

Ye Aṉṟil with beak sharp, down-hearted that you are,
Your voice is feeble and without sleep you suffer
During long spells of night; did you also covet
As I do, the cool tulaci garland at the feet
Of the Lord, reclining on His serpent couch?

Note

Just as he was addressing the stork, the Āḻvār heard the Aṉṟil birds in the neighbouring palmyra tree, crying out their agony of separation, as and when their bills got unlocked during sleep, vide also the preamble to this decad. The

Āḻvār extends his sympathy to these birds, looking upon them as comrades-in-distress.

kāmuṟṟa kaiyaṟavōṭu ellē irāppakal
nī muṟṟak kaṇ tuyilāy; neñcu uruki ēṅkutiyāl;
tī muṟṟat teṉ ilaṅkai uṭṭiṉāṉ tāḷ nayanta
yām uṟṟatu uṟṟāyō? vāḻi! kaṉai kaṭalē. (II–1–3)

Translation

You languish without sleep, You roaring Sea!
Both day and night, and your heart is watery, I see;
Are you with grief afflicted as we are,
Not attaining the feet of our Lord Who by fire
Destroyed Laṅkā? May you from grief be free and prosper!

Notes

(i) The Sea can be said to sleep when it is silent without throwing the waves up. But the waves are surging up and down all the time, be it day or night; this sleeplessness is attributed by the Āḻvār to its separation from the Lord.

(ii) The sea roars and it is mere sound with no meaning, just like the indistinct sound coming from a throat, choked with grief. The Āḻvār is inclined to think that the poor thing is down with grief, too deep for words.

(iii) The Āḻvār would appear to tell the sea: "Sītā was also a woman like me, and Śrī Rāma languished without food and sleep, bunded the Sea, a herculean task indeed, and got at her. He is, however, unmindful of me. Do you also feel tortured by His indifference, as I do?"

kaṭalum malaiyum vicumpum tuḻāy empōl
cuṭar koḷ irāppakal tuñcāyāl, taṉ vāṭāy!
aṭal koḷ paṭai-āḻi ammāṉaik kāṇpāṉ nī
uṭalam nōy uṟṟāyō, ūḻitōṟu ūḻiyē? (II–1–4)

Translation

Do you from chronic malady suffer, you chill wind?
Like me you sleep not, by day or night, but try to find
Groping thro' space, hill and dale, our mighty Lord
Who does, in sweet array, Conch and Discuss wield.

Notes

(i) If the wind is chill, the Āḻvār thinks it is due to delirium; if the wind moves about, all over, all the time, gathering all the dust in the process, as is its wont, the Āḻvār thinks that it goes in search of the Lord with the frantic fervour of an importunate lover who dashes off, breaking all norms of feminine conduct, disfigures herself and musters public opinion for the acceleration of her union with her beloved.

(ii) Periyāḻvār searched for the Lord in the milk ocean; Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār went roving round Tiruvēṅkaṭam, the Hill station and other pilgrim centres down below, playing the role of the importunate lover, referred to in (1) above. And here, Nammāḻvār is inclined to think that the wind is also a kindred soul. exhibiting a similar behaviour.

ūḻitōṟu ūḻi ulakukku nīrkoṇṭu,
tōḻiyarum yāmum pōl, nīrāy nekiḻkiṉṟa
vāḻiya, vāṉamē! nīyum matucūtaṉ
pāḻimaiyil paṭṭu, avaṉkaṇ pācattāl naivāyē? (II–1–5)

Translation

Ye clouds, into tears you break for ever
And flood the worlds; do you in sorrow dwindle
Like me and my comrades, under the spell irresistible
Of Matucūtaṉ, coveting Him heart and soul?
May you from misery be free and prosper!

Notes

(i) It is clear from this, that Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī and comrades of her ilk are grief-stricken to such an extent that their profuse tears flood the worlds like the rain-water unleashed by the clouds.

(ii) Matucūtaṉ (Madhusūdha)-Lord Mahā Viṣṇu, Who slew Madhu, the demon. The Āḻvār queries whether the clouds did also come under the spell of the Lord, attracted by His glorious trait of vanquishing the evil forces, in the same way as he and others of his ilk did.

naivāya emmēpōl, nāḷ matiyē! nī in nāḷ
mai vāṉ iruḷ akaṟṟāy; māḻāntu tēmputiyāl;
ai vāy aravu-aṇaimēl āḻip perumāṉār
mey vācakam kēṭṭu, uṉ meynnīrmai tōṟṟāyē? (II–1–6)

Translation

Worn out like us, you withering Moon!
These days, the dark sky you don't illumine;
You have, it seems, lost your erstwhile sheen,
Misled by the utterance of the Lord who the discus holds,
Reclining on the serpent with its five hoods.

Notes

(i) The Moon waxes and wanes because of its different phases, but Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī attributes the waning of the Moon and the resultant diminution of its brightness to a mental malady, on a par with her own.

(ii) In her present state of mental depression, the Nāyakī is so sore with the Lord that she says that the Lord's utterances should not be taken at their face value. No doubt, Śrī Rāma averred that his tongue shall never lie. Unfortunately, however, the Āḻvār reproaches the Lord as being double-tongued like the serpent on which He reclines. The serpent has a double-forked tongue in each of its hoods and here is a serpent with five hoods. And then, it was with His discus that the Lord covered the Sun and converted day into the illusory night; thus, the discus was a pawn in the game, an accomplice of the Lord for carrying out the strategy. If, as Śrī Rāma, the Lord scrupulously adhered to truth, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, He would not mind swerving from it, if thereby He could do a good turn to His devotees. It could not, therefore, be said that the Lord was guilty of falsehood, merely sticking to the letter with academic zeal, without going into the spirit behind His actions. The Lord is beneficial to His devotees both ways, by adhering to the truth, as Śrī Rāma did, and swerving from it, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa did. Nampiḷḷai observed: "We seek shelter alike in Rāma's truthfulness and Kṛṣṇa's diplomacy (seeming falsehoods).

tōṟṟōm maṭa neñcam em perumāṉ nāraṇaṟku; em
āṟṟāmai colli aḻuvōmai, nī naṭuvē
vēṟṟōr vakaiyil koṭitāy, eṉai ūḻi
māṟṟāṉmai niṟṟiyō? vāḻi! kaṉai iruḷē! (II–1–7)

Translation

We have unto Nāraṇaṉ, Our Lord
Lost our hearts and we did our sorrows lament
In each other's company but step in you did,
Worse than our foes you are, you darksome night!
May you prosper and from this state be rid.

Notes

(i) This stanza, as worded above, does not accord with the pattern of the preceding and succeeding stanzas in this decad. Based, however, on the diction as such, Emperumāṉar (Rāmānuja) and other Ācāryas were inclined to interpret this song, as follows: The dark night, instead of weeping along with Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī and her comrades, is worse than a foe, in so far as it prevents their seeing each other and bemoaning their common lot of separation from the Lord.

(ii) There is, however, another method of interpreting this stanza, so as to bring it on a piece with the rest. Not knowing that darkness is an inherent quality of the night, Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī sympathises with it and exclaims, "We are already weighed down by our own calamity and here you are, exhibiting your own dire distress of darkness and adding to our miseries. May you soon be rid of this state and prosper!"

irulin tiṇi vaṇṇam mā nīrk kaḻiyē! pōy
maruḷuṟṟu irāppakal tuñcilum nī tuñcāyāl;
uruḷum cakaṭam utaitta perumāṉār
aruḷin peru nacaiyāl āḻāntu nontāyē? (II–1–8)

Translation

You channel, the dark waters in abundance
You discharge, day and night, bewildered;
Do you also pine, with deep desire, for the grace
Of the Lord who the (demon in the) rolling wheel shattered?

Note

Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī gropes her way through, in darkness, and not being able to distinguish land from water, comes to a channel discharging lots of water and making plenty of noise in the process. She thinks that the channel is also lamenting its separation from Lord Kṛṣṇa, who destroyed Śakaṭāsura and whose grace it pines for.

nontu ārāk kātal-nōy mel āvi uḷ ulartta–
nantā viḷakkamē! nīyum aḷiyattāy!
centāmarait taṭaṅ kaṇ, ceṅkaṉi vāy em perumāṉ
am tāmam taṉ-tuḻāy ācaiyāl vēvāyē? (II–1–9)

Translation

You undying flame, sad indeed is your plight,
Your gentle soul stands withered; burnt are you
By the desire to get the tulacī garland, cool and bright,
Worn by our Lord with large lotus-eyes and lips of red hue?

Notes

(i) Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī returns home in a state of mental exhaustion, and sees the burning lamp. The heat of the flame, she thinks, is the one generated by its separation from the Lord, an experience identical with hers.

(ii) The flame of the lamp is not homogeneous, being of different intensity of heat at different places or zones, as they are called; the flame itself comes up anew every moment, a fact which can be gathered only by inference. It is an optical illusion that the flame appears to be single, instead of an unbroken succession of different flames. Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī goes by what she sees and calls it an undying flame.

vēvu ārā vēṭkai nōy mel āvi uḷ ulartta
ōvātu irāppakal uṉpālē vīḻttu oḻintāy;
mā vāy piḷantu, marutiṭai pōy, maṇ aḷanta
mūvā mutalvā! iṉi emmaic cōrēlē. (II–1–10)

Translation

Primate of perennial youth, the horse's (Kēci, the demons) big mouth you split,
'Tween the twin trees you crawled and broke them down,
The worlds you measured; in you engrossed, day and night,
Our tender souls, with blistering malady of love struck down,
Have badly dried up, pray, henceforth leave us not.

Note

Seeing the Āḻvār's pangs of separation from Him, the Lord approaches the Āḻvār, shedding His cool grace. Thereupon, the Lord is told by the Āḻvār that his tender soul, already worn out and emaciated due to its separation from the Lord, thaws down still further in contemplation of His wondrous deeds and glorious traits. The Āḻvār also fervently prays to the Lord, not to forsake him any more.

cōrāta ep poruṭkum ātiyām cōtikkē
ārāta kātal kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
ōrāyiram coṉṉa avaṟṟuḷ ivai pattum
cōrār, viṭār kaṇṭīr vaikuntam tiṇṇaṉavē. (II–1–11)

Translation

Those that are regular in reciting these stanzas ten,
Out of the thousand composed by Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,

Of love insatiable for the resplendent Lord, the root cause
Of one and all, shall surely enjoy for ever, Heavenly bliss.

Notes

(i) It is only after the Lord came and joined the Āḻvār that He became God indeed, the Protector of one and all, *without any exception*; again, the Lord became resplendent, only after His union with the Āḻvār.

(ii) It is also noteworthy that, In this decad, the Āḻvār has come to be identified through his boundless love for the Lord; that is why he is referred to not as mere Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ but as Caṭakōpaṉ of insatiable God-love.

Second Centum—Second Decad (II-2)
(Tiṉṉaṉ vīṭu)

Preamble

In the last decad, the Āḻvār was confined to the bottom-most depth of dejection and his yearning for the Lord baffled description. It was but meet that the Lord came and presented Himself before such an ardent devotee and saved him from collapsing altogether. It goes without saying that, when the Āḻvār came, face to face, with the Lord, all his erstwhile dejection and the resultant fatigue vanished altogether. The Āḻvār then made up his mind not to allow himself to be swept off once again, by contemplating the Lord's trait of 'Saulabhya' (easy accessibility). He would rather tackle the other plank, safe and steady, namely, the Lord's overlordship and transcendent glory and sustain himself.

No doubt, in the opening decad of the first centum also, the Āḻvār spoke about the Lord's Supremacy and transcendent glory. But that was in a different key altogether. There it was direct postulation, as such, running parallel to the Vedic texts. Here, the Āḻvār establishes the Lord's Supremacy through an elimination of the claims of the possible contenders for this position of Super-eminence, citing the relevant anecdotes from the 'Itihāsas' and 'Purāṇas.' There it was confined solely to the 'Para' or transcendent state of the Lord in the High Heavens whereas here, the

Supremacy of the Lord is brought out in His 'Vibhava' or incarnate state. Speaking about the Avatāras (Incarnations), the Lord's wondrous deeds can bear endless repetitions, without satiety. Every time the same trait or deed is repeated, there is a freshness about it, with a new aroma.

tiṉṉaṉ vīṭu mutal muḻutum āy,
eṇṇiṉ mītiyaṉ, em perumāṉ,
maṇṇum viṇṇum ellām uṭaṉ uṇṭa nam
kaṇṇaṉ kaṇ allatu illai ōr kaṇṇē. (II–2–1)

Translation

There is no God other than my Sire, Kaṇṇaṉ,
(Whose traits and possessions) defy enumeration,
The granter of 'Mokṣa', the supreme bliss firm and fine,
Who at once ate up all the worlds, for their sustentation.

Note

The Āḻvār affirms that Lord Kṛṣṇa who enthralled him by His innumerable auspicious traits, is the Supreme Lord of the whole Universe, the granter of Mokṣa, the final bliss. During the period of deluge, He did sustain all the worlds by keeping them within His stomach and this is referred to here, as His having eaten them up. This 'eating up' actually connotes that the Lord sustains the worlds and their contents within His stomach with the same relish as one has for food. The minor deities, Brahmā, Rudra and others, are also among those, so sustained by the Lord. Need it be specifically said that the one who sustains is superior to those sustained?

ē pāvam! paramē! ēḻ ulakum
ī pāvam ceytu aruḷāl aḻippār ār–
mā pāvam viṭa, araṟkup piccai pey
kōpāla kōlariēṟu aṉṟiyē? (II–2–2)

Translation

Who but Kōpālaṉ, the mighty Lion,
Who unto Araṉ gave alms and from heinous sin

Redeemed, can the seven worlds graciously sustain,
Ridding them of all sins? What a pity, none can
Describe His glory, well beyond enumeration!

Notes

(i) In the preceding stanza, the Āḻvār averred that there is none superior to Kōpālaṉ (Lord Kṛṣṇa). When some persons questioned the propriety of such an assertion in the face of the Vedic texts glorifying Brahmā, Rudra and other Celestials, the Āḻvār turned round and said: "Well, you had better examine the record of performance of each of them and judge for yourselves. When they all got into trouble, each in his own way, they all sought asylum in Lord Maha Viṣṇu. Could there still be any misgiving about His supremacy over all the rest?"

(ii) The Āḻvār feels very much vexed that, in the midst of his God-enjoyment, he should have to leave the track and tackle these deluded enquirers, wasting much precious time in explaining the much-too-obvious, the difference between a priceless gem and poor clay.

(iii) The ill-effects of the sins committed by us, in a trice, can hardly be liquidated even after the sufferings of ages and yet it is the Lord's redemptive grace that grinds them to a halt.

ēṟaṉai pūvaṉai, pūmakaḷ-taṉṉai,
vēṟuiṉṟi viṇ toḻat taṉṉuḷ vaittu,
mēl-taṉṉai mītiṭa nimirntu,
maṇ-koṇṭa, māl-taṉiṉ mikkum ōr tēvum uḷatē? (II–2–3)

Translation

Could there be a God greater than Tirumāl, our Lord,
Who has on His person lodged Ēraṉ (Rudra) and Pūvaṉ Brahmā
Besides Pūmakaḷ (Lakṣmī, the lotus-born), whom the Devas
Worship, who upwards grew and measured all the worlds?

Notes

(i) See notes below I-3-9 regarding the positions taken up by the exalted Rudra and Brahmā, on the Lord's person.

The Celestials adore the Lord's condescending grace in accommodating, on His broad person, besides Śrī Mahālakṣmī, Rudra and Brahmā.

(ii) As Tṛvikrama, He encompassed all the worlds.
These are convincing proofs of His supremacy over all the rest.

tēvum epporuḷum paṭaikkap pūvil nāṉmukaṉaip paṭaitta
tēvaṉ em perumāṉukku allāl, pūvum pūcaṉaiyum takumē? (II–2–4)

Translation

Can one worship and with flowers decorate
Any one other than 'Emperumāṉ' (our Supreme Lord)
Who, the lotus-based, four-headed Brahmā, ushered,
The Devas and the rest to create?

Notes

(i) Worship can be offered only to the Supreme Lord and being of exquisite charm, He alone is worthy of decoration.

(ii) Here is an interesting anecdote:

Prior to his absorption into the Vaiṣṇavite fold, Empār, the illustrious Preceptor (a cousin of Śrī Rāmānuja) was, for some time, serving in the Śivā temple at Kāḷahasti, under the appellation of "Uḷḷaṅkai Koṇarnta Nāyaṉār". One day, when he stood perched on a tree, gathering flowers for the diurnal worship of the Deity, right underneath, Śrī Tirumalai Nampi, his uncle, was discoursing on this particular stanza to his disciples. The votary, high up on the tree, burst out with an emphatic 'NO', in reply to the question put in this stanza, jumped down, tore off his Rudrākṣa necklace

(worn by the votaries of Rudra and fell at the feet of the learned discourser, seeking refuge in him.

takum cīrt taṉ taṉi mutaliṉuḷḷē
mikum tēvum ep poruḷum paṭaikkat
takum kōlat tāmaraik kaṇṇaṉ, emmāṉ
mikum cōti mēl aṟivār evarē? (II–2–5)

Translation

Does one Know of any other, more radiant
Than our lovely lotus-eyed Lord, omniscient and omnipotent,
Who, by His resolve unique, could bring into being
The Devas, (men) and all other things?

Note

One of the fundamental characteristics of the Supreme Lord is 'Puṇḍarīkākṣatva' (i.e.) His being lotus-eyed. These tell-tale eyes will straightaway proclaim His supremacy. Enthralled by His bewitching looks, the Āḷvār swears that He is the Supreme Lord. c.f. Śloka 12 of the hymnal gems of Yāmuna, where

He queries:

" Who but Śrīman Nārāyaṇa is the red lotus-eyed?
Who but He is Puruṣottama, the highest?

evarum yāvaiyum ellāp poruḷum
kavarvu iṉṟit taṉṉuḷ oṭuṅka niṉṟa
pavar koḷ ñāṉa-veḷḷac cuṭar mūrtti-
avar em āḷi am paḷḷiyārē. (II–2–6)

Translation

He Who, in His stomach, holds with ease,
The sentient beings, the non-sentient things and all these,
Is the lovely Lord, of Knowledge immense;
Dear to me, He of exquisite form lies on the *watery expanse.*

Note

This may refer either to the Lord reclining on the milk-ocean or on the watery expanse, during the deluge.

paḷḷi ālilai ēḻ ulakum koḷḷum
vaḷḷal val vayiṟṟup perumāṉ
uḷuḷ ār aṟivār-avaṉ-taṉ
kaḷḷa māya maṉakkaruttē? (II–2–7)

Translation

Who indeed can plumb the unfathomable mind
Of the Lord Supreme who could hold the worlds seven
In His stomach, big and tough,
And repose on a tender fig- leaf?

Note

Only the Supreme Lord is capable of achieving the seemingly impossible, blending within Himself the incompatibles, such as holding inside His stomach all the worlds and lying as a tender babe on a fig- leaf floating on the waterv expanse. None can indeed probe His mysteries and comprehend them. It can only be said that nothing is beyond Him and there lies the clue to His supremacy.

karuttil tēvum ellāp poruḷum
varuttitta māyap pirāṉ aṉṟi, yārē-
tiruttit tiṇ nilai mūvulakum tammuḷ
iruttik kākkum iyalviṉarē? (II–2–8)

Translation

None but Māyappirāṉ (the Benefactor great of mysterious prowess)
Can by a mere resolve create Devas and all else.
Who else can His natural affinity possess
To preserve by sheer will all the three worlds?

Note

This cuts across the popular notion that Brahmā is the functional Deity for creation and Viṣṇu, the Deity for sustentation. Actually, Mahā Viṣṇu controls all the three functions of creation, preservation and dissolution, and Brahmā and Rudra are mere functionaries on His behalf.

kākkum iyalvinaṉ kaṇṇa-perumāṉ
cērkkai ceytu, taṉ untiyuḷḷē
vāytta ticaimukaṉ intiraṉ vāṉavar
ākkiṉāṉ, teyva ulakukaḷē. (II–2– 9)

Translation

Lord Kaṇṇaṉ Whose nature it is to protect,
Did (at the time of dissolution) collect
All the worlds into His navel and then create
Ticaimukaṉ (Brahmā), Intiraṉ and Vāṉavar (Devas) and their worlds (holy and bright).

Notes

(i) Lord Kṛṣṇa is Supreme, because He controls all the three functions of creation, sustentation and dissolution. It was to dispel the undesirable gloom and grant the coveted felicities that the Lord incarnated as Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

(ii) At the time of dissolution, one and all, without any exception, get inside Him. This is then followed by re-creation of the worlds and that way, the cyclic process goes on, epoch after epoch.

kaḷvā! emmaiyum ēḻ ulakum niṉ-
uḷḷē tōṟṟiya iṟaiva! eṉṟu,
veḷ-ēṟaṉ nāṉmukaṉ intiraṉ vāṉavar
puḷ-ūrti kaḻal paṇintu, ēttuvarē. (II–2–10)

Translation

Veḷḷēṟaṉ (Rudra), Nāṉmukaṉ (Brahmā), Indra and Vāṉavar (Devas) congregate
And worship at the feet of the Lord with that bird (Garuḍa) as His mount
And unto Him, pray 'Iṟaiva' (by your resolve), you brought out
The seven worlds and us all and yet you will hide out,
Like a thief, your greatness and to us for favours resort".

Notes

(i) The Celestials, including Rudra, with the white bull as his mount, the four-headed Brahmā, Indra and others of that exalted band, seek various boons from Mahā Viṣṇu, the Supreme Lord, and their power to grant, in turn, the wishes of their votaries is thus derived from Him alone. And yet, they wish to tickle their vanity by making it appear that even the Supreme Lord seeks favour from them. It is noteworthy, Lord Kṛṣṇa just tickled the vanity of Rudra when He sought from the latter that He be blessed with a son through His consort, Rukmiṇī. It is for this that the Lord has been referred to, in this stanza, as a thief.

(ii) Divya Kavi (The poet, *par excellence*), Piḷḷai Perumāḷ Ayyangār exclaims: "Oh, Lord, what a paradox that you, from whom all things emanate, are dubbed a thief for having stolen butter! Actually, we are the thieves, who think and act as if we are our own, not realising that we belong to you, the rightful owner".

ētta ēḻ ulakum koṇṭa kōlak
kūttaṉaik kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col
vāytta āyirattuḷ ivai pattuṭaṉ
ētta vallavarkku illai ōr ūṉamē. (II–2–11)

Translation

For those who learn and laud these songs ten,
Out of the thousand bequeathed unto us, by Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
In adoration of the enchanting Lord, who did span
With ease, the worlds seven, drawbacks there will be none.

Notes

(i) Those, who learn these ten songs and enter into their spirit will be firm in their conviction that Mahā Viṣṇu is the Supreme Lord; they will thus be free from the drawbacks of (i) not looking upon Mahā Viṣṇu as the Supreme Lord and (ii) looking upon Deities other than Mahā Viṣṇu, as Supreme. For the matter of that, the

solitary episode of Trivikrama, of charming beauty, measuring effortlessly all the worlds in just three strides, is enough to assert Mahā Viṣṇu's Supremacy.

(ii) The Lord's Supremacy has been set out, in this decad, under various counts, namely, destruction of the sins of devotees and ridding them of distress, being lotus-eyed, friend-in-need, achieving the impossible and blending the incompatibles, laudation by the exalted celestials, Rudra, Brahmā and others, control of all the three functions of creation, sustentation and dissolution and so on.

Second Centum—Third Decad (II-3)
(Ū̲nil vā̲l uyirē)

Preamble

In the first decad of this centum, we saw the Ā̲lvār in dire distress. Towards the end, the Lord, however, deigned to present Himself and once again, the Ā̲lvār is in rapturous rapport with the Lord. In this decad, he gives vent to the joy of reunion with the enchanting Lord. In strict sequence, this should have been the second decad instead of being the third. The Ā̲lvār's immediate reaction, on seeing the Lord come back to him, was, however, that one of such super eminence, the overlord of the Celestials, should have at all deigned to mingle with one so low. And, therefore, he straightaway expatiated on the Lord's transcendental glory, in the second decad.

ūn̲il vā̲l uyirē! nallai, po! un̲n̲aip per̲r̲u,
vān̲ulār̲ perumān̲, matucūtan̲, en̲ ammān̲,
tān̲um yān̲um ellām tan̲n̲ul̲l̲ē kalantol̲intōm:
tēn̲um pālum neyyum kan̲n̲alum amutum ottē. (II–3–1)

Translation

Oh, ye mind, dwelling in the fleshy body,
You are indeed good; because of you, It (this vassal)

Could with Matucūtan̲, my Lord, mingle, chief of Celestials
And into Him dissolve like honey, milk, nectar and candy.

Notes

(i) In this decad, where the Ā̲lvār gives vent to his joy of communion with the Lord, the one he was pining for, praise is first bestowed on his forward mind which had overtaken him in its flight to God, seeking the bliss of union with Him. This is like a prince, restored back to his lost kingdom by some one, thanking that person first. The word ' Uyir ' (soul) in the original text, by implication, refers to the mind, the principal adjunct, stirring up one's thoughts either way.

(ii) The last line refers to the blend of all that is delicious and it can either be an admixture of all these delicacies or the mixture of like things only, (i.e.) honey with honey, milk with milk, nectar with nectar and so on.

ottār mikkārai ilaiyāya mā māya!
ottāy ep poruṭkum, uyir āy, en̲n̲aip per̲r̲a
at tāy āy, tantai āy, ar̲iyātan̲a ar̲ivittu,
attā! nī ceytan̲a aṭiyēn̲ ar̲iyēn̲ē. (II–3–2)

Translation

There's none above you, Oh, Lord of wondrous traits!
And none equal to you, and yet forms you'd take
Like all others; you are the life-giver
To one and all, the Mother that yielded me, the Father
And Preceptor, ' tis beyond me to list out all your favours.

Notes

(i) While patting on the back of his forward mind, in the preceding song, the Ā̲lvār realised that even such an evolved mind was but the Lord's gift and, therefore, he passed on to sing the glory of God.

(ii) When this song was discoursed upon, by that great preceptor, Empār, the question was raised by some one in the learned assembly as to who is the first spiritual

preceptor for every Individual. Some said, "The Guru who imparts the requisite spiritual knowledge", while some others observed "It is the Śrī Vaiṣṇava who puts us on to the spiritual preceptor for acceptance". Empār, however, clarified: "Indeed, the Lord, seated in the region of our heart, is the first Preceptor, hidden and unseen though, for it is He who, from His vantage position inside us, granted us the impulse not to resist but to yield to the good offices of the visible preceptors outside and of the helpers who put us on to such preceptors.

a̱riyāk kālattuḷḷē aṭimaikkaṇ a̱npu ceyvittu,
a̱riyā mā māyattu aṭiyē̱nai vaittāyāl;
a̱riyāmaik kuṟaḷ āy, nilam māvali mūvaṭi e̱nṟu
a̱riyāmai vañcittāy, e̱natu āviyuḷ kalantē. (II–3–3)

Translation

Wonderful 'tis, you got into my mind,
And in me, in (the clutches of) this mystic land,
Still immature, did instil the desire to serve you around,
Even as you did on the sly, obtain the land
Of three strides from Māvali (Mahābali), as Vāmaṉa, the little lad.

Note

The present versification conforms to the interpretation given by Śrī Rāmānuja, duly changing the prose order of the text, as in the original, quite in keeping with the current milieu. Śrī Rāmānuja was taught the meaning of this song by his spiritual Instructor (Tirumālai Āṇṭāṉ), as follows, without any change in the prose order of the poem (as in the original text).

"You instilled in me the desire to serve you at a time when I was hardly evolved and yet, you have kept me wallowing in worldly life, the hot-bed for ignorance, instead of promoting my God-love and providing the necessary incentives therefor".

Śrī Rāmānuja had, however, no hesitation in pointing out to the learned Instructor that, put that way, it would be a reproach against the Lord and would, therefore, be a misfit in this decad, where the Āḻvār gives vent to the joy of Union with the Lord and sings His glory.

e̱natu āviyuḷ kalanta peru nal utavik kaimmā̱ṟu
e̱natu āvi tantoḻintē̱ṉ; i̱ṉi mīḷvatu e̱npatu uṇṭē?
e̱natu āvi āviyum nī, poḻil eḻum uṇṭa entāy!
e̱natu āvi yār? yā̱ṉ ār? tanta nī koṇṭākki̱ṉaiyē. (II–3–4)

Translation

My Sire, Who did in your stomach sustain
The worlds seven, you dissolved into my soul;
For this great good, my soul I offer you, in return,
There isn't any going back; but what is my soul?
Who am I? what is yours indeed, you have taken,
You are the Giver great, the Soul of my soul.

Notes

For all the good done to him by the Lord, the Āḻvār wanted to recompense Him and so, he offered his soul to the Lord, adding, with extra gusto, that it was a firm offer from which he would not recant. A little introspection, however, made him realise that there is hardly anything which does not belong to God and there is, therefore, no question of surrendering the soul to the Lord to whom it rightly belongs. What is it that is being surrendered and whose was it before the surrender? To surrender to the Lord that which already belongs to Him would be tantamount to the assumption of an ill-conceived right of ownership of the thing surrendered, in derogation of the divine right of ownership.

These very sentiments were echoed by Saint Yāmuna in ślokas 52 and 53 of 'Stotra Ratna' (hymnal gems). Well, the dilemma in which Saint Nammāḻvār and Saint Yāmunācārya were caught up, is bound to present itself to every one of us, as long as we live in this abode. Scared by the horrors of earthly existence, one is tempted to surrender one's soul to the Lord, as if it is one's own and could be

bartered away in this manner, and then the correction follows, based on the realisation of one's essential nature and the inter-relationship between Man and God. Surrendering oneself unto the keeping of the Lord, with the full awareness and awakening of one's essential nature (svarūpa), as the Lord's own, solely dependent on Him, stands, however, on a different footing.

iṉi yār ñāṉaṅkaḷāl eṭukkal eḷāta entāy!
kaṉivār vīṭṭu-iṉpamē! eṉ kaṭal-paṭā amutē!
taṉiyēṉ vāḻ-mutaḷē! poḻil ēḻum ēṉam oṉṟāy
nuṉi ār kōṭṭil vaittāy! nuṉa pātam cērntēṉē. (II–3–5)

Translation

My Lord, mere learning, however profound, Can't comprehend Thee,
Unto your lovers you are the fountain of heavenly bliss;
You are my nectar, not that stuff from the Saltish sea,
But the very source of life for this lover peerless;
On your pointed tusk, you lifted the worlds seven,
As the Boar unique and so have I your feet now attained.

Note

The Āḻvār rejoices that he has been reclaimed by the Lord from the Ocean of Samsāra, even as He reclaimed the Earth from under the Oceanic waters, after slaying Hiraṇyākṣa, the golden-eyed demon.

cērntār tīviṉaikaṭku aru nañcai, tiṉ matiyai,
tīrntār-tam maṉattup piriyātu avar uyiraic
cōrntē pukalkoṭāc cuṭarai, arakkiyai mūkku
īrntāyai, aṭiyēṉ aṭaintēṉ, mutal muṉṉamē. (II–3–6)

Translation

Unto your devotees, you vouchsafe a mind steady and bright,
Never apart from the devout, you are their very life and beacon light,

A deadly poison for their sins, the devil's (Sūrpaṇakhā's) nose you smote,
From the earliest time this vassal is at your feet.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār affirms that he always belonged to the Lord and rejoices, now that he is in the Lord's company, forgetting all the pangs of the earlier separation.

(ii) It is said that one has to inevitably pass through the reactions of one's past actions. But this is true only in the case of those who are not devoted to the Supreme Lord, while, in respect of the devout, He operates as a deadly poison, destroying all their sins.

(iii) Steadfastness of mind is indeed one of His great gifts. Here is a nice illustration.

When king Ambarṣa was doing *Tapas*, in devout contemplation of Lord Mahā Viṣṇu, the Lord appeared before him, disguised as Indra and insisted that the King should ask of him boons. As Indra was not the Deity the King was meditating upon, the latter resented the former's intrusion and requested him to get away, his exalted position notwithstanding

(iv) When a lustrous gem is reclaimed from the slush into which it had got sunk for long, it shines again as before, as this sheen is nothing new and the lustre always belonged to it. Similar is the case with the Āḻvār who always belonged to the Lord, but stands reclaimed only now.

muṉ nal yāḻ payil nūl narampiṉ mutir cuvaiyē!
pal-nalār payilum paraṉē! pavittiraṉē!
kaṇṇalē! amutē! kār mukilē! eṉ kaṇṇā!
niṉ alāl ilēṉkāṇ; eṉṉai nī kuṟikkoḷḷē. (II–3–7)

Translation

You are the delectable melody, chaste and matured,
From the ancient lyre, and by the eminent adored;

Oh, Lord! pure and Supreme, sweet like nectar and cane juice
My cloud-hued Kaṇṇā! I do seek refuge
In none but you, take note and make me yours.

Notes

(i) Notwithstanding the assertion, as in the last song, that he belonged to the Lord from time immemorial, the Āḻvār apprehends the frightful possibility of getting separated from the Lord, over again, and he, therefore, entreats Him to note that he cannot brook separation from Him Who is sweetness itself. The sweetness of music which attracts the cow, the infant and the snake alike, is proverbial, and the Lord is the very source of this sweetness.

(ii) That the Lord is pure needs no special mention but what is emphasised here is that He purifies worldlings like us and makes us fit to join the rank and file of the pure souls in the yonder Heavens.

kuṟikkoḷ ñāṉaṅkaḷāl eṉai ūḻi cey tavamum
kiṟikkoṇṭu, ip piṟappē cila nāḷil eytiṉaṉ yāṉ–
uṟikkoṇṭa veṇṇey pāl oḷittu uṇṇum ammāṉ piṉ
neṟikkoṇṭa neñcaṉāyp piṟavit tuyar kaṭintē. (II–3–8)

Translation

Right in this birth and in a short space
Have I attained what others achieve down the ages
Through deep penance and Knowledge intense,
Freed from the miseries of birth, all by the grace
Of my Lord, who stole and ate from hanging hoops
Milk and butter, with my mind unto Him very close.

Note

The Āḻvār could attain the Lord right now, not by following the disciplines, rigid and rigorous, but solely by His Grace which alighted on him while contemplating the boyish pranks of the Lord, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, eating stealthily, the milk and butter, stored up in hanging hoops, in the pastoral village of Gokula.

kaṭi vār taṇ am tuḻayk kaṇṇaṉ, viṇṇavar perumāṉ,
paṭi vāṉam iṟanta paramaṉ, pavittiraṉ cīr,
ceṭi āṟ nōykaḷ keṭa, paṭintu kuṭaintu āṭi,
aṭiyēṉ vāymaṭuttup parukik kaḷittēṉē. (II–3–9)

Translation

Sporting the Cool tulacī garland, full of fragrance,
Kaṇṇaṉ, Chief of Celestials, has no equal,
Even in heaven; unto Him, pure and supreme, this vassal
Could come close and get rid of sins, vast and dense,
Revelling and singing profusely His traits auspicious.

Note

The Āḻvār rejoices that he could partake of the heavenly bliss even here, as the Lord is right with him in all His celestial grandeur, the dense sins which stood between him and the Lord having been eradicated, root and branch, by His grace. It is a case of the immaculate Lord purifying one and all falling within the purview of His sweet, spontaneous grace.

kaḻippum kavarvum aṟṟu, piṟappup piṇi mūppu iṟappu aṟṟu,
oḷikkoṇṭa cōtiyumāy uṭaṉkūṭuvatu eṉṟu kolō–
tuḷikkiṉṟa vāṉ, in nilam-cuṭar-āḻi caṅku ēnti–
aḷikkiṉṟa māyap pirāṉ aṭiyārkaḷ kuḻāṅkaḷaiyē? (II–3–10)

Translation

Oh, when shall I enter and enjoy the holy gatherings
Of devotees of the wondrous Lord, holding the conch and discus radiant,
Protector of Heaven and Earth, the light that all knowledge illumines,
Getting rid of pleasures worldly and the resultant sufferings,
Birth and death, old age and pestilence?

Note

In the preceding song, the Āḻvār gave vent to his supreme joy, exclaiming that the very heavenly bliss had come to him, right here.

The Lord asked the Āḷvār whether there was anything more He could do for him. The Āḷvar replied:

" My Lord, there is no doubt that I have found Heaven on Earth. But then, the fear whether the present enjoyment can go on for all time without interruption, haunts me situated as I am, in this material body, with all the ailments flesh is heir to, surrounded by the material world, swayed by the wayward senses. And, therefore, this body should go and the scene shifted to the uncontaminated High Heavens where I could enjoy the holy company of the ' Nityas ' (ever-free angels) and the ' Muktas ' (the released souls) ".

kuḷām koḷ pēr arakkaṉ kulam vīya muṉintavaṉai
kuḷām koḷ teṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ terintu uraitta
kuḷām koḷ āyirattuḷ ivai pattum uṭaṉ pāṭi,
kuḷāṅkaḷāy, aṭiyīr! uṭaṉkūṭiniṉṟu āṭumiṉē. (II–3–11)

Translation

Dance, ye devotees! in a body, singing diligently, these songs ten,
Out of the cluster of thousand learned songs of Caṭakōpaṉ,
Chief of the apostles of Ten Kurukūr, in adoration
Of the irate Lord, who routed the demon (Rāvaṇa) and his battalions.

Note

In this end-stanza, there is a departure from the usual pattern of setting out the benefits of learning and singing the ten songs in each decad. The Āḷvār emphasises the importance of these ten songs being sung in a chorus by the devotees, as an end in itself. It may also be construed that those who learn these ten songs will have the felicity of singing them in the holy company of devotees, unlike the Āḷvār, who languished for want of such an association. It is worth repeating here the following exhortation of Nampiḷḷai, the great Preceptor:

" Until you reach the Eternal Land, the few of you who are devoted to the Supreme Lord, should, during the few days of your stay in this abode, sink all petty differences, based on lust and lucre, and sing, in one voice, the Lord's glory, for your common enjoyment and edification ".

Second Centum—Fourth Decad (II-4)
(Āṭi āṭi)

In the penultimate song of the last decad the Āḷvār expressed his desire to sing profusely the glory of the Lord in a chorus. Looking around, he, however, found the prospect of mustering persons from the rank and file of the worldlings for this purpose pretty bleak. He had, therefore, no option but to shift the venue of his enjoyment to the high Heavens and sing the Lord's praise in the company of the ' Nitya Sūris ' there. This ardent longing of the Āḷvār was, however, not realised there and then and once again the Āḷvār was thrown into deep dejection assuming the overtones of a frustrated feminine lover in a state of despondency. The Āḷvār had got into such a state on two earlier occasions, namely I-4 and II-1. On the first occasion he sent some birds as his emissaries to the Lord, while, on the second occasion, all things around seemed to suffer, like him, the pangs of separation from the Lord and he, therefore, wept along with those comrades-in-distress. But now his grief is so deep and poignant that all that is said in this decad is put in the mouth of the mother who questions the Lord how He could reduce her love-intoxicated daughter to such a parlous state and asks Him to clarify His intentions as to what exactly He proposes to do about the poor little victim.

No doubt, it is the Āḷvār who sings, and yet, this assumes the form of a mother's dialogue with the Lord indicating an extremely critical state so far as the Āḷvār is concerned. This is like the swollen river Kāverī or Gaṅgā branching off into rivulets, going by different names but carrying the same water as in Kāvērī or Gaṅgā. The necessity for the mother's intervention here, in this decad, unlike the two earlier decads referred to above can be understood if we probe into the genesis of each of these three decads. It is a matter of common knowledge that the grief over the loss of a thing varies in direct proportion to the value one attaches to the

thing lost. For example, as between the loss of a silver piece and a gold piece, the latter causes a far more grievous feeling of privation. If the same person, later on, lost a neeklace set with costly gems and rubies it would be the worst blow. And now let us analyse the cause of the Āḻvār's grief at the commencement of each of the two earlier decads. In I-3-10 the Āḻvār wanted to adore and embrace the Lord's pair of feet which spanned the entire Universe during His Avatār as Trivikrama. But he couldn't get at those feet and, in the grief that ensued, he sent the birds on an errand to the Lord as in I-4. Again, in I-10-9, the Āḻvār devoutly longed for communion with the Lord in His Iconic form in the pilgrim centre, Tirukkuruṅkuṭi (deep south in Tamiḻ Nādu). Non-materialisation of this ardent desire brought on grief far more intense than on the earlier occasion in view of the relatively greater importance of the thing now lost, namely, communion with the Lord in His Iconic manifestation, a veritable ocean of innumerable excellances vis-a-vis His Incarnate form which is like the river, once in spate, now turned dry or turgid. And now what is the position? In II-3-10 the Āḻvār pined for entry into the gatherings of the devotees and singing profusely the glory of the Lord in their steadfast company. But this did not happen immediately, and naturally, the loss is the worst so far on the analogy of the successive loss of silver, Gold and gem-studded necklace. So great is the importance attached to the company of the Godly. This accounts for the induction of the mother into the scene.

It might be questioned why this decad complains at the door of the Lord instead of being couched as an appeal to the band of the devotees on the Yonder side, whose company the Āḻvār pines for but could not have. Well, the complaint was always lodged with the King, the aggrieved party rushing to the Palace gate even though the gems and rubies were looted by robbers in the jungle. As a matter of fact it is only the Lord who grants us all felicities including participation in the gatherings of the Godly and hence, the appeal at His door.

āṭi āṭi akam karaintu, icai
pāṭip pāṭik kaṇṇīr malki, eṅkum
nāṭi nāṭi, naraciṅkā! eṉṟu
vāti vāṭum iv vāḷ-nutalē. (II–4–1)

Translation

This young dame of forehead bright,
Keeps rattling, with a mind worn out;
Looking out all over she sings and sings,
Cries out, "Oh, Naraciṅkā!" and sinks.

Notes

(i) The mother exclaims:

"Alas! my daughter feels let down by the Lord who, as Narasimha (Man-Lion), came to Prahlāda's aid. Restive and rattling, she looks out for Him everywhere, her heart melts down in contemplation of the Lord and she cries out for Him in melodious notes expressive of her melancholy".

(ii) The tears flowing down the cheeks of Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī in torrents remind us of Hanumān's query to Sītā, the Divine Mother in captivity, why tears were rolling down her cheeks.

(iii) Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī is looking out here, there and everywhere for the Lord who, she is sure, will never fail to succour His devotees. As Narasiṅkā He had studiously stationed Himself in every nook and corner, pillar and particle. While discoursing on this song, Śri Parāśara Bhaṭṭar said:

"Parāṇkuśa Nāyakī is looking for the Lord even in the folds of her sari.". Had He not once got on to the hip of the Āḻvār in the course of His ascent to the Āḻvār's head? (I-9-4).

(iv) Says the gnostic mother: "My daughter is indeed worried, over and over again, whether the Lord would help only Prahlāda and not her. She has not, however, given up hopes as yet and that is why life is still sticking to her". Face is the index of the mind and Parāṅkuṣa Nāyakī's lingering hopes are reflected on her forehead.

vāḷ-nutal im maṭavaral, ummaik
kāṇum ācaiyuḷ naikinṟāḷ; viṟal
vāṇaṉ āyiram tōḷ tuṇittīr! ummaik
kāṇa, nīr irakkam ilīrē. (II–4–2)

Translation

To behold you (of beauty exquisite),
Who, the thousand arms of mighty vāṇaṉ smote,
This young lady of forehead bright
Stands consumed by a burning desire,
But your grace on her you don't confer.

Notes

(i) " Oh, Lord Kṛṣṇa, You secured Uṣā, the daughter of the mighty Bāṇāsura for Aniruddha, your grandson, after chopping off the Asura's thousand sinewy shoulders. And yet you would not relent in the case of my daughter and relieve her distress ".

(ii) Reference has again been made to the bright forehead of Parāṅkuṣa Nāyakī only to betray the mother's surprise at the Lord's indifference even to one of such fascinating charm.

(iii) *Mother to the Lord*:

" Oh, it is all topsy-turvy my daughter pining for you! It should be the other way around. It is indeed the Owner who should be all agog to get at his property."

The Lord retorts saying, " Well, your daughter's desire to get at me may be all right but the impediments to the realisation of her desire are heavier still ".

But then, the mother is not prepared to swallow this. She asks Him " For one who smote the thousand arms of the mighty Bāṇāsura, is it at all difficult to cut out these impediments? "

irakka maṉattōṭu eri aṇai
arakkum meḻukum okkum ivaḷ;
irakkam eḻīr; itaṟku eṉ ceykēṉ-
arakkaṉ ilaṅkai ceṟṟīrukkē? (II–4–3)

Translation

You, who the demon's Laṅkā did rout,
Relent not for this dame of tender heart,
Who is like unto wax set on fire;
Oh, what can I do for her?

Note

Mother to the Lord

" What you did to reclaim Sītā from her captivity in Laṅkā, how you languished without food and sleep days on end, how you bunded the roaring sea and routed Rāvaṇa's Laṅkā, lock, stock and barrel have been chronicled by sage Vālmīki in his immortal Rāmāyaṇa. And so it is well within the Knowledge of my hapless daughter. Therefore it is she feels tormented why she couldn't get a similar treatment at your hands. Oh, what a contrasting picture! my daughter of melting tenderness of heart, like the wax come in contact with fire, and you, absolutely hard-hearted and unrelenting. What can I do, in between? There is no remedy for this situation except the influx of your sweet grace. I daresay you who did so much for Sītā, will not lay yourself open to the charge of cruel partiality and terrible discrimination by not coming to my daughter's aid, at once. "

ilaṅkai ceṟṟavaṉē! eṉṉum; piṉṉum,
valam koḷ puḷ uyarttāy! eṉṉum; uḷḷam
malaṅka vev uyirkkum; kaṇṇīr mikak
kalaṅkik kaitoḻum niṉṟu ivaḷē. (II–4–4)

Translation

Says unto you my daughter, oh, Lord,
" Laṅkā, (for Sītā's sake) you destroyed
And on your banner is the mighty bird (Garuḍa)";
With a mind agitated and breathing hot,

Tears well up her eyes and badly upset,
And stunned she stands, with joined palms.

Notes

Mother to the Lord

(i) "I thought I had consoled my daughter saying that she should sustain herself meditating on your meritorious deeds as Śrī Rāma with the firm belief that you will, some day, succour her as you did Sītā. Even Sītā had to wait for quite some length of time before she was reclaimed from her captivity in Laṅkā. But suddenly my daughter has started crying as before. But then, She says that you were pining for Sītā all the time, but you just can't remember this poor girl. It is not as if you lack the means of locomotion if only you wished to come and meet my daughter. She is well aware that the mighty Garuḍa, moving at supersonic speed, is always at your disposal. And so she concludes it is sheer indifference on your part. On the other hand she is very much agitated and bursting with tears. Nevertheless, with joined palms she is worshipping You. I just don't know what to do".

(ii) It is worth noting that, whatever be the mood and mode of speech of the Āḻvār, be he calm or agitated, his basic stance as the Lord's sole servitor (Śeṣatva) remains quite *in tact*; in other words, his essential nature (svarūpa) does not undergo any modification. That is how reference is made to the Parāṅkuṣa Nāyakī's worshipping posture even in such an extremely critical state of mental cogitation (see, in this connection, aphorism 119 of 'Ācārya Hṛdayam').

ivaḷ irāppakal vāyverīt taṉa
kuvaḷai oṇ kaṇṇa nīr koṇṭāḷ; vaṇṭu
tivaḷum taṉ am tuḷāy koṭīr-eṉa
tavaḷa vaṇṇar takavukaḷē? (II–4–5)

Translation

Day and night this girl keeps babbling
And in her flowery eyes tears are swelling;

You don't on her bestow your tulaci garland, cool and lovely,
Swarmed by bees; What has happened, (I can't see)
To you of disposition pure and your quality of mercy.

Note

(i) Mother to the Lord

"Well, if you don't relent even in such a precarious condition of my daughter what indeed has happened to your quality of mercy? Has it dried up altogether?

My daughter is talking about you all the time whereas it should be the other way round. We know from Hanumān's report to Sītā how you kept pining for her, spending sleepless days and nights, thinking and talking about her all the time. Oh, what a pity! the eyes of my daughter which should shed tears of joy are bursting with sorrow. After all, what does she want from you? Nothing more than the cool tulacī garland from your person in replacement of the withered one on her feverish body, consumed by the pangs of separation from you. Actually, she envies the bees gaily swarming your garland studded with honey, and even wishes that she had been born as one of those fortunate bees".

(ii) Reference has been made by the mother to the Lord's purity of disposition and quality of mercy in this context rather sneeringly. Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar would put it that the mother means to say, "Well, if there were a few persons like you the girls would indeed prosper very well!"

takavu uṭaiyavaṉē! eṉṉum; piṉṉum,
mika virumpum pirāṉ! eṉṉum; eṉatu
aka-uyirkku amutē! eṉṉum-uḷḷam
uka urukiniṉṟu uḷuḷé. (II–4–6)

Translation

Says my daughter, with a mind thawing,
Right from the inner core of her being,
"Oh, Lord! you are indeed merciful,

You are my highly coveted Benefactor,
And to my inner soul, the nectar ''.

Notes

(i) In the preceding stanza the mother complained about a heartless Lord, who had put her daughter in such a parlous predicament. But no sooner had the mother opened her mouth, with such a reproach on her tongue than the daughter (Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī) gagged it effectively, despite her pangs of separation from the Lord, by proclaiming that the Lord is an inexhaustible fountain of grace and a highly coveted Benefactor. To dub Him as devoid of mercy would be just as inconceivable as the ocean getting emptied of all its water.

(ii) A close parallel to this can be found in Rāmāyaṇa, Sundara Kāṇḍa, 26-13 where, even while bemoaning her captivity in Laṅkā, Sītā extolled the great qualities of Śrī Rāma and lamented that one of such excellence had not so far come to her rescue merely because she lacked the requisite felicity, being totally devoid of grace because of the offence thrown by her, once at Rāma and a much greater offence at Lakṣmaṇa later on. This clearly shows that there can be absolutely on flaw or drawback in the Lord warranting His being given up on any account, even in trying moments of separation from Him. As a matter of fact, what is sought to be classified as a drawback in the Lord, if at all, is just the mental agony inflicted by Him on the devotees when He doesn't favour them with His nectarean presence. But even this has a purpose behind, forming, as it does, part of the Lord's technique of shock-treatment whereby the devotee's appetite for God is whetted.

uḷuḷ āvi ularntu uḷarntu, eṉa
vaḷḷalē! kaṇṇaṉē! eṉṉum; piṉṉum,
veḷḷa nīrk kiṭantāy! eṉṉum-eṉa
kaḷvi tāṉ paṭṭa vañcaṉaiyē! (II–4–7)

Translation

Enticed by the Lord is my daughter
And her inner soul is fully dried
And yet from me she tries to hide
And cries out, " Oh, my liberal Lord,
Kaṇṇā, resting on oceanic waters ''.

Notes

(i) With an aching heart the mother gives expression to her daughter's enticement by the Lord and her present critical condition. The soul which is inherently incapable of being burnt or dried up, is said to have been dried up in Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī's case. And yet, she tries to keep her mother off the track and lauds her beloved Lord.

(ii) Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī says her Lord is a great Benefactor, a liberal donor and all that, just like a person in deep thirst calling repeatedly, ' water, water ' or chewing up bits of refined camphor.

(iii) In Viṣṇu dharma, one is advised to meditate on Lord Narasimha, while moving about in a frightfully dark night, to ward off evils; likewise, one, in dire distress or deep thirst, should think of the Lord reclining in the milky ocean.

(iv) Śrī Rāma had exclaimed that he couldn't be away from Sītā, the dark-eyed, even for a trice.

The Lord's position vis-a-vis Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī should also be just the same and yet, the mother witnesses things happening in the reverse order here and she, therefore, calls it a mere treachery.

vañcaṉē! eṉṉum; kaitoḻum; taṉa
neñcam vēva neṭitu uyirkkum-viṟal–
kañcaṉai vañcaṉai ceytīr! ummait
tañcam eṉṟu ivaḷ paṭṭaṉavē! (II–4–8)

Translation

Oh, Slayer of heady Kañcaṉ, here is my daughter
Who in you refuge sought and is now in great distress ;

The heavy sigh she heaves, her heart blisters ;
And yet, with folded hands she does your treachery own,
How You made her your vassal, to her unknown.

Notes

(i) When the mother complained in the previous song about the treacherous enticement of her daughter by the Lord, Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī could not bear this affront to her beloved Lord. Uttering the same word, 'treachery', as the mother did, the Nāyakī gives it a different complexion. The Lord's treachery lies in the great good He has done her by making her His vassal *unknown to her.*

(ii) The daughter's distress, referred to by the Mother, can be analysed as follows:

She does not go after food and raiment like the worldlings;

Nor does she enjoy the heavenly bliss like the celestials in Heaven;

She cannot wait patiently till, one day, the final goal is reached;

Nor does the Lord finish her off as He did the heady Kamsa, upsetting all his nefarious plans.

How tantalising, and that too, for one whose sole refuge is the Lord! This is the mother's complaint.

paṭṭa-pōtu eḻu-pōtu aṟiyāḷ; virai
maṭṭu alar taṉ-tuḻāy eṉṉum-cuṭar
vaṭṭa vāy nuti nēmiyīr! numatu
iṭṭam eṉkol, iv ēḻaikkē? (II–4–9)

Translation

Neither Sun-rise nor Sun-set, my daughter knows
And yet her mouth utters "tulacī, cool and fragrant,
Studded with honey", Oh Sire, holding the discuss effulgent,

Sharp and round! what indeed do you propose
To do with this girl who is so innocent?

Notes

(i) Unlike the worldlings who know day and night too well, earning by day and spending by night those earnings on worldly pleasures, Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī is altogether ignorant of Sun-rise and Sun-set. Does it mean that she is not sentient? She is no doubt sentient as her mouth constantly utters the words 'tulacī cool and fragrant, studded with honey'.

(ii) When the Lord was indifferent to the above observations of the mother she asked Him;

"Sire, the effulgent discus in your hand is ever ready to go into action, helping your devotees and destroying the evil-doers. What precisely do you intend to do with my daughter? Will you get rid of her as you did Hiraṇya and his brood?

or

Will you elevate her to the rank of the celestials on the Yonder heaven and enjoy her bewitching beauty, enhanced still further by the conch and discus in her hands?

or

Will you put her back among the worldlings buried in earthly pleasures oblivious of their essential nature and their relationship with you?"

ēḻai pētai irāppakal taṉa
kēḷ il oṇ kaṇṇa nīrkoṇṭāḷ; kiḷar
vāḷvai vēva ilaṅkai ceṟṟīr! ivaḷ
māḷai nōkku oṉṟum vāṭṭēṉmiṉē. (II–4–10)

Translation

Laṅkā's spectacular wealth you routed, Oh, Sire,
This poor girl's eyes of peerless beauty shed tears

Day and night; may you keep, at least,
The youthful looks in her eyes in tact!

Notes

Mother to the Lord

"The tears welling up my daughter's eyes day and night resemble the water drops around the lotus leaf shining like pearls, a sight indeed for you which you cannot afford to miss. Actually it is you that had worked her up to such a pitch and would you not like to behold and enjoy the fruits of your labours?

Is it not a sight for Gods, the rapturous ravishment of the love-smitten Saint, when his whole being thrills with love and his eyes swim with pearls of tears?

If you think that there are heavy impediments in the way of your joining my daughter can't you eradicate them even as you routed the demoniac Rāvaṇa's Laṅkā? Well, if you are intent upon destroying my daughter also, please do not go the whole hog out as you did in the case of Rāvaṇa, but spare at least her bewitching looks which is about all that remains of her now.

If she passes away we will lose her. But mind you, you will lose your very source of sustenance. You are known to subsist on the sweet looks of your consorts. It is up to you now not to run into a personal loss of such a magnitude".

vāṭṭam il pukaḻ vāmaṉaṉai icai
kūṭṭi, vaṇ caṭakōpaṉ col amai
pāṭṭu ōr āyirattu ip pattāl aṭi
cūṭṭalākum am tāmamē. (II–4–11)

Translation

Those that recite these songs ten,
Out of the thousand melodious songs of Caṭakōpaṉ,
Graciously composed and grammatically clean,
In adoration of Vāmaṉaṉ of undying renown,

Will have the fortune great,
To offer lovely flowers at His feet.

Notes

(i) Those that recite these ten songs will be endowed with the bliss of rendering perennial service at the feet of the Lord in the company of the 'Nitya Sūrīs' in Heaven, the very bliss coveted by the Āḻvār at the end of the last decad, without passing through any of the sufferings undergone by the Āḻvār.

(ii) In the first song of this decad reference was made to Parāṅkuṣa Nāyakī withering down. Actually her condition reflects the state of the Lord as well. And now that mention is made of Vāmaṉaṉ of undying fame, it can be inferred that He rose to His full stature by responding to the mother's call to preserve her daughter's looks, the very source of His sustenance. And so He is back again face to face with the Saint.

(iii) Mention has been made here of Vāmaṉaṉ, in particular, as He was known to be very keen about the reclamation of His possessions even if it involved His having to seek alms. And now, will He lag behind even after the mother had begged of Him to take particular care of His very source of sustenance?

Second Centum Fifth Decad (II-5)
(Am Tāmattu Aṉpu)

Preamble

The sufferings undergone by the Āḻvār, as set out in the last decad, are comparable to the titanic struggle of Gajendra, the elephant, with the crocodile. Even as the Lord rushed, with an aching heart, to the pond post-haste on hearing the alarum raised by the elephant the Lord felt exceedingly remorseful that He did not rush to meet the Āḻvār as soon as the latter became critical of His nonchalance, that is, His not rushing to his aid despite His having the mighty Garuḍa to carry Him anywhere at supersonic

speed. See II-4-4. By way of making amends for this remissness, the Lord has now come to the Āḷvār, in all His splendour and paraphernalia and is at the height of His joy in the blessed company of the Saint. Beholding the joyous Lord, the Saint feels immensely delighted and relates, in this decad, his ecstatic experience.

am tāmattu aṉpu ceytu eṉ āvi cēr ammāṉukku
am tāmam vāḷ muṭi caṅku āḻi nūl āram uḷa ;
centāmaraittaṭam kaṇ; ceṅkaṉi vāy ceṅkamalam ;
centāmarai aṭikaḷ; cempoṉ tiru-uṭampē. (II–5–1)

Translation

The Lord stands in my soul stationed,
Looking upon it as the lovely Heaven, wears He a pretty garland,
The dazzling crown, conch and discus, sacred thread
And chain; His eyes are like red lotus ponds,
His lips and feet also like lotus red, aglow is His person like red gold.

Notes

(i) It is the Lord's will that the Āḷvār should be kept in this abode a little longer for the benefit of humanity at large. The Āḷvār, however, aspired to enter the gatherings of the celestials in the yonder Heaven and sing the Lord's glory profusely and for ever in their holy company. See II-3-10. As a compromise, the Lord meets the aspiration of the Āḷvār by conferring on him the heavenly bliss longed for by him right here. The Āḷvār rejoices that the Lord exhibits unto him all that love which He bears for the celestials and describes the Lord's glowing features.

(ii) Tirumālai Āṇṭāṉ, referred to earlier, told Śrī Rāmānuja, while studying this song, that he had heard it said by his preceptor, Yāmunācārya, that the Āḷvār rejoices in this song as the Lord has joined him along with the entire band of 'Nityā Sūris' as aspired for by him. But Śrī Rāmānuja opined that this song relates how the Lord's person, His jewels, weapons etc, all of which lacked lustre and were as good as non-existent before He mingled with the Āḷvār, now shine with extra brilliance which fascinated the Āḷvār so much.

(ii) Yet another version is: In that section of the Vedās, known as the 'Antarāditya Vidya,' the Lord is said to shine inside the Sun, assuming a body glittering like gold, lotus-eyed, bejewelled and so on; the Lord has now entered the Āḷvār's person with all that splendour.

tiru-uṭampu vāṉ cuṭar; centāmarai kaṇ; kai kamalam;
tiru iṭamē mārvam; ayaṉ iṭame koppūḻ;
oruvu iṭamum entai perumāṟku araṉē; ō!
oruvu iṭam oṉṟu iṉṟi, eṉṉuḷ kalantāṉukkē. (II–5–2)

Translation

Oh, what a wonder! the Lord who holds on His chest
Tiru (Lakṣmī), whose navel is Brahmā's seat while the rest
Is by Araṉ held, has with me mingled, leaving vacant
No space in my body; beams my Sire's body with rare brilliance
And aglow like the lotus red are His eyes and hands.

Notes

(i) Lakṣmī, the Divine Mother, stands ensconced on the Lord's chest; Brahmā, the demi-urge, appointed by the Lord to create all the fourteen worlds, would not budge from His navel and the rest of the Lord's body is occupied by Araṉ (Rudra). One so great has now come and taken possession of the entire body of the Āḷvār. Thrilled by his contact with the Lord's exquisite person, the Āḷvār describes His lustrous body. When He casts loving glances at the Āḷvār, the latter sees His lotus eyes proclaiming His overlordship (Sovereignty and Supremacy). Apprehending the frightful possibility of the Āḷvār once again resiling, overwhelmed by the Lord's Sovereignty, the Lord catches hold of the Āḷvār by the hand. At once, the Āḷvār describes the lotus hand that gripped him.

(ii) While discoursing on this song, the great Preceptor, Nañcīyar feelingly remarked:

(iii) "The Āḻvār, who is our greatest well-wisher, speaks of the Lord's body beaming with brilliance. Indeed, there is hardly a sin as heinous as denying the Lord, His form and attributes, even as there is no favour done by the Lord to us, so great as this one of our being kept outside the pale of such a heresy".

(iv) It is noteworthy that it is not a mere fantastic visionary but Saint Śaṭakōpa, endowed by an Omniscient Lord with knowledge, full and complete, shorn of doubts, despair, discrepancies and deviations, (See I-1-1) that goes into raptures over the Lord's exquisite Form. Compare also, Lord Rāma offering His body, in embrace, to Hanumān, the glorious emissary, on the latter's return from his pioneering visit to Laṅkā, deemed by the Lord as the choicest gift, He could māke, befitting the particular context. Surely, it was not an illusory or fictitious body that the Lord palmed off as the choicest gift but one most coveted by Himself and specifically assumed by Him for the purpose of His avatāra.

eṉṉuḷ kalantavaṉ ceṅkaṉi vāy ceṅkamalam;
miṉṉum cuṭar-malaikkuk kaṇ, pātam, kai kamalam;
maṉṉum muḻu ēḻ ulakum vayiṟṟiṉ uḷa;
taṉṉuḷ kalavātatu ep poruḷum tāṉ ilaiyē. (II–5–3)

Translation

The One, in me mingled, sparkles like a dazzling mount,
Like unto the lotus red are His mouth, eyes, feet and hands,
His stomach does all the worlds seven sustain,
There's scarcely a thing that doesn't in Him converge.

Notes

(i) Not only Lakṣmī, Brahmā and Rudra, but whatever exists subsists in Him alone. Even so, it is now made to appear that the Lord cannot subsist except by mingling with the Āḻvār, who has, in this context, given Him yet another name (like Nārāyaṇa Vāsudēva) namely, 'The one in me mingled'.

(ii) The Lord is in full bloom and joy only after He mingled with the Āḻvār and has acquired stability like a mountain. The Lord's resplendent person, eyes, mouth, hands and feet, all resembling red lotus, are indeed far more attractive now, than ever before, having acquired new dimensions. Little wonder then, the Āḻvār is never tired of describing the Lord's exquisite form and His charming features, as reoriented.

ep poruḷum tāṉ āy, maratakak kuṉṟam okkum;
appoḻutait tāmaraippūk kaṇ pātam; kai kamalam;
eppoḻutum nāḷ tiṅkaḷ āṇṭu ūḻi ūḻitoṟum
appoḻutaikku appoḻutu eṉ ārā amutamē. (II–5–4)

Translation

The Lord, who in Him all things contains,
Like unto an emerald mount shines;
With eyes, feet and hands, like red lotus in fresh bloom,
A non-satiate nectar unto me He is, at all times,
Thro' days, months, years and aeons.

Note

In his preamble to this song, the illustrious Nampiḷḷai says: Seeing the Āḻvār comparing repeatedly the Lord's eyes, lips, hands and feet to red lotus, some persons asked him why he went on repeating the same thing. The Āḻvār rejoined, "Well, I cannot help saying so, for every moment, down the days, months, years and a whole epoch, there is a freshness about Him, like the lotus in fresh bloom and hence there is no room for satiety nor is there any question of an insipid repetition of something, stale and static.

ārā amutamāy alāviyuḷ kalanta
kār ār karumukil pōl eṉ ammāṉ kaṇṇaṉukku
nērā vāy cempavaḷam, kaṇ pātam kai kamalam;
pērāram nīḷ muṭi nāṇ piṉṉum iḻai palavē. (II–5–5)

Translation

The non-satiate nectar, the cloud-hued Lord,
Has into my worthless soul entered;
Can the fruits red compare with the lips of Kaṇṇaṉ, my Sire;
Or the lotus flower match His eyes, hands and feet, ever?
Many indeed are His jewels, the crown, tall and majestic,
The necklace huge, waist band and all that.

Note

The Āḷvār who was hitherto comparing the Lord's lips to red fruits and His eyes, hands and feet to the red lotus flower, has now a closer look at the Lord inside him and finds that the Lord is of matchless beauty and incomparable excellence and that the things hitherto compared with Him, stand nowhere. Then the Āḷvār beholds the vast array of jewels on the Lord's person and starts enumerating them, only to give it up as impossible. The Lord's crown, tall and majestic, proclaims His sovereignty over the entire Universe, comprising the two Vibhūtis 'Nitya Vibhūti' (Eternal Land) and the 'Līla Vibhūti' (Sportive Universe).

palapalavē āparaṇam; pērum palapalavē;
palapalavē cōti vaṭivu; paṇpu eṇṇil,
palapala kaṇṭu, uṇṭu, kēṭṭu, uṟṟu, mōntu iṉpam;
palapalavē ñāṉamum: pāmpu-aṇai mēlārkēyō! (II–5–6)

Translation

The Lord who on serpent bed reclines,
(Has acquired inside me dimensions new);
Were I to pause and examine His union
With me, an endless variety unto me He unravels,
Of jewels, Forms exquisite and how in me He revels
Thro' the sensual channels many with appropriate Know-how.

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār feels that the Lord, in union with him, is not satisfied with His assumption of a single form, a single set of jewels, a single method of enjoyment of the Āḷvār through the senses of seeing, smelling etc, or single type of knowledge but wants to enjoy the Āḷvār in myriad ways, employing different techniques, assuming different forms, displaying different sets of jewels, so on and so forth.

(ii) As Nampiḷḷai puts it, the Lord wants to enjoy the Āḷvār, assuming many forms, as Sage Śaubhari did, with regard to his umpteen wives. The Lord exhibits the same ardour in His enjoyment of the Āḷvār as the emancipated soul does, on reaching Heaven, for enjoying the Lord.

pāmpu-aṇaimēl pāṟkaṭaluḷ paḷḷi amarntatuvum,
kāmpu aṇai tōḷ-piṉṉaikkuāy ēṟu uṭaṉ ēḻ ceṟṟatuvum,
tēm paṇaiya cōlai marāmaram ēḻ eytatuvum,
pūm piṇaiya taṇ-tuḷāyp poṉ muṭi am pōr ēṟē. (II–5–7)

Translation

Trim and lovely, like the martial bull, my Lord,
Sporting the gold crown and the tulaci garland,
Cool and well-knit, on the serpent-bed reclined
In the milk-ocean, tamed all at once the bulls seven
For the sake of Piṉṉai of shoulders fine and pierced the trees seven.

Notes

(i) In terms of the new technique adopted by the Lord, as set out in the previous song, the Lord exhibited a few of the wondrous deeds performed by Him long back and the Āḷvār records them here, as envisioned by him.

(ii) According to one tradition, Nappiṉṉai, the charming shepherdess, believed to be an incarnation of Goddess Nīlā Devi, was a niece of Yaśodhā. Her father had set up a precondition for any one seeking her hand, namely, the taming of seven unruly bulls, all at once. Śrī Kṛṣṇa assumed seven different forms, tackled these bulls effectively and tamed them to win the charming bride. A Demon named Kālaṉēmi had been slain by the Lord in a previous Yuga. The seven sons of the

demon swore vendetta against the Lord and were reborn as seven bulls, determined to kill Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

poṉ muṭi am pōr ēṟṟai, emmāṉai, nāl-taṭam tōḷ
taṉ muṭivu oṉṟu illāta taṇ-tuḻāy mālaiyaṉai,
eṉ muṭivu kāṇātē eṉṉuḷ kalantāṉai,
colmuṭivu kāṇēṉ nāṉ; colluvatu eṉ? collīrē. (II–5–8)

Translation

Majestic like the warring bull is my Lord,
Sporting the gold cown, of sinewy shoulders four,
Of limitless glory, wearing the cool tulacī garland;
Mingled He with me, not minding my status poor,
Falter do I as I attempt to sing His glory interminable,
Better tell me how to laud (my Lord), ye worldlings voluble!

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār says that it is beyond his capacity to describe the condescending love of One, so great, mingling with him, so low.

(ii) The Lord's crown and tulacī garland proclaim His sovereignty. If His glory is limitless, there is also no limit to the Āḻvār's abjectness and yet He has chosen to mingle with the Āḻvār. By His deeds and traits, the Lord enthralled the Āḻvār who, however, finds that words are not adequate to describe his experience. On the other hand, the worldlings revel in their own spheres and wax eloquent. The Āḻvār turns round and asks them how they could freely indulge in all that rhetoric, when he himself suffered from tardiness of expression, overawed.

collīr eṉ ammāṉai; eṉ āvi āvitaṉai;
ellai il cīr eṉ karumāṇikkac cuṭarai:
nalla amutam, peṟaṟku ariya vīṭum āy,
alli malar virai ottu, āṇ allaṉ; peṇ alaṉē. (II–5–9)

Translation

Better sing the praise of my Sire,
The Soul of my soul, the lustrous sapphire,

Of auspicious qualities endless, the delectable nectar,
The Ordainer great of 'Mokṣā', difficult to attain,
Sweet like the fragrance of the lotus flower,
Neither the male nor the female we know of.

Notes

(i) Although the Āḻvār found himself speechless, yet he could not resist the urge to sing the Lord's praise, in the company of the worldlings. And, therefore, he exhorts them to desist from the worldly affairs, at least for a while, and sing the Lord's glory along with him.

(ii) Being a 'Puruṣa' (Male), the Lord is certainly not a female and being a 'Puruṣottama' (gem of a male), He is very different from the other males, we know of. That is why it has been said here that He is neither the male nor the female *of the known variety.*

āṇ allaṉ; peṇ allaṉ; allā aliyum allaṉ;
kāṇalum ākāṉ; uḷaṉ allaṉ; illai allaṉ;
pēṇuṅkāl, pēṇum uru ākum; allaṉum ām:
kōṇai peritu uṭaittu em pemmāṉaik kūṟutalē. (II–5–10)

Translation

'Tis indeed very difficult to sing precisely, my Lord's glory
Neither male nor female is He nor the eunuch neutral,
He exists not, nor does He not exist;
Him the naked eye can't see and yet He assumes
The form the devout desire while unto others He is just inaccessible.

Note

In Ṛig Veda, 'Āraṇyaka', the Lord is said to be quite apart, that is, different from the rest. Therefore it is, the Āḻvār says that He is neither male nor female, nor the 'in-between'. A Tamil Pundit, who was listening to Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar's discourse on this song, observed that it smacked of the doctrine of nothingness (Śūṉya), as the Lord could not be brought under any of the three known categories of beings. But the learned discourser pointed out that, in this song, the

Lord has not been referred to, in the neuter gender but described only in the masculine gender, as a male, who is, however, very different from other males and hence not the male, we know of.

kūṟutal oṉṟu ārāk kuṭak kūtta ammāṉaik
kūṟutalē mēvik kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
kūṟiṉa antāti ōr āyirattuḷ ip pattum
kūṟutal vallār uḷarēl, kūṭuvar vaikuntamē. (II–5–11)

Translation

Those that can recite these stanzas ten,
Out of the thousand sung by Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
Keen to recount the traits, beyond description,
Of (Lord Kṛṣṇa), the great pot-dancer, will the high heaven attain.

Notes

(i) Those, conversant with this decad, will atain Heaven without undergoing any of the sufferings, passed through by the Āḻvār as set out in the last decad. It is like the sons enjoying, with ease, the property acquired by the father, by dint of hard labour and sufferings.

(ii) It is not the Lord's transcendental glory that baffles description but His easy accessibility and wondrous deeds like pot-dancing etc., during His Avatār as Lord Kṛṣṇa. If, however, the Āḻvār could manage to talk about the Lord's 'Saulabhya' or simplicity galore, it is indeed the victory of his faith, his deep love for God, infused in him by the Lord Himself.

Second Centum–Sixth Decad (II-6) (Vaikuntā Manivaṇṇaṉē)

Preamble

As set out, in the last decad, the Āḻvār is experiencing the Supreme bliss of Union with the Lord, like Heaven transplanted right here. And what about the Lord? In the supreme joy of His union with the Āḻvār, the Lord is exploring new avenues of regaling him as well as those associated with him. What a fine reciprocity?

In II-3, the Āḻvār pined for the company of the Lord's devotees and now the Lord's love for the Āḻvār extends to his devotees as well. But at the same time, He also apprehends the possibility of the Āḻvār slipping back to his old ways and shrinking away from Him, overwhelmed by His transcendent glory. The Āḻvār feels the Lord's pulse all right and hastens to assure Him that he would not give up his Lord on any account and that his present grip on Him is very tight indeed.

Śrī Nampiḷḷai likens the Lord's apprehension, referred to above, to Śrī Rāma's apprehension whether the extremely happy days, he and Śīta had in Citrakūṭ in each other's delightful company, would at all go on for all time, being too good to last long.

vaikuntā! maṇivaṇṇaṉē! eṉ pollāt tirukkuṟaḷā! eṉṉuḷ maṉṉi,
vaikum vaikal tōṟum amutu āya vāṉ ēṟē!
cey kuntā arum tīmai uṉ aṭiyarkkut tīrttu, acurarkkut tīmaikaḷ
cey kuntā! uṉṉai nāṉ piṭittēṉ; koḷ cikkeṉavē. (II–6–1)

Translation

Of sapphire hue, oh, Vaikunta! (Lord of Heaven)
My lovely midget (Vāmana)! in my heart, steadfast you remain,
Oh, Chief of celestials! unto me You are nectarean,
Every fleeting moment; You redeem Your devotees' dire sins
And to the Acuras You just pass them on.
Kuntā (Immaculate Lord)! firm unto You I hold on, please note.

Notes

(i) In the last decad, even while enjoying the bliss of the Lord's union with him, the Āḻvār referred to himself as worthless (II-5-5) and as being lowly without limit, even as there is no limit to the Lord's greatness (II-5-8). Naturally, expressions such as these roused the suspicion of the Lord that the Āḻvār, whose company He covets so much, might once again be caught up in a vein of abject humility and want to run away from Him. But

the Āḷvār assures an agitated Lord that He could trust him, when he says that he won't think of leaving Him at all. Here is a picture, in the reverse order, if one recalls a similar assurance held out by Lord Kṛṣṇa to an agitated Arjuna. (Gītā XVIII-66).

(ii) Reference to Vāmana, in the second line of this stanza, is given a beautiful turn by Nampiḷḷai. Vāmana Mūrtī's charming personality and wonderful comportment, baffling description, were lost on all else except the Āḷvār, who was enthralled by these qualities of the Lord and could get Him lodged in his heart. This was indeed a great loss to Indra, who was mindful of his only gain merely, the return of his lost kingdom and to Mahābali, whose only concern was to maintain his reputation as a great donor. There was absolutely no question of the others then on the scene, the ungodly Śukrācārya, who was made to lose his eye, and Namuṣi, who was hurled, high up in the sky, having been attracted by Vāmana's enthralling charm. The sole beneficiary is, therefore, Nammāḷvār, in whom such a charming Lord now stands enshrined.

(iii) The grip of the Āḷvār on the Lord is said to be so tight that even the Lord cannot shake him off, if He wished to do so.

cikkeṉac ciṟitu ōr iṭamum puṟappaṭāt taṉṉuḷḷē ulakukaḷ
okkavē viḻuṅkip pukuntāṉ; pukuntataṟpiṉ, [eṅkum
mikka ñāṉa veḷḷac cuṭar-viḷakkuāy, tuḷakku aṟṟu, amutamāy,
pakkam nōkku aṟiyāṉ, eṉ paintāmaraik kaṇṇaṉē (II–6–2)

Translation

With all the worlds in His stomach, neatly compressed
(And all His regal duties, duly disposed)
The resolute Lord has got inside me and thus transposed,
His radiant Knowledge, in spate, shines forth like the lamp bright;
Feeling firm and secure, with the assurance from me got,

My nectar, the lotus-eyed Lord, sees not
This side or that (and is in me so rapt).

Notes

(i) In the original text of this stanza, mention has been made of the Lord having gulped down all the worlds and kept them secure in His stomach, before entering the Āḷvār's body. What the poet intends to say is that the Lord attended not only to this particular duty but all His other regal duties, as well, so that, once He enters the Āḷvār's body, His rapport with the Āḷvār may go on undisturbed, unlike the worshipper, ostensibly in front of the Deity in the Sanctum Sanctorum, but anxious, all the time, about the safety of the pair of new Sandals, left by him at the temple gate.

(ii) The Knowledge of the Omniscient Lord is said to have acquired new dimensions after His entering the Āḷvār's body and thus shines with extra brilliance. And then, so completely rapt and engrossed with the Āḷvār is the Lord that He wouldn't turn His attention elsewhere, not even when Lakṣmī, the Lord's favourite spouse, puts her fair arms round His neck and draws Him extremely close to her breast. The following anecdote is very apt and can easily drive home the point.

(iii) On being informed by his preceptor, Maṇakkāl Nampi (Śrī Rāma Miśra), that one Kurukaikkāval Appaṉ had a Yogic secret to communicate, Āḷavantār (Yāmuna) journeyed all the way to Kaṅkaikoṇṭa-Cōḷapuram, to meet the said Yogi. As Appaṉ was seated, deeply engrossed in Yoga, facing a wall, Āḷavantār dared not disturb the Yogi and kept himself behind, at some distance. Lo! Appaṉ suddenly turned round and enquired whether some one belonging to the 'Coṭṭai' clan was standing behind. While humbly introducing himself as one of the said pedigree, Āḷavantār begged the Yogi to disclose how the presence of one staying well behind was at all

perceived. Appaṉ revealed that, while holding a rapport with him, the Lord would not allow Himself to be disturbed by any one including His alluring and most-beloved spouse, Lakṣmī, and yet, pressing his neck, the Lord turned round, thrice or four times, in the hind direction. The Yogi was well aware that such an extra-ordinary preference was shown by the Lord only to members of the 'Coṭṭai' family and hence his enquiry, as above. Āḷavantār was the grandson of Śrīmaṉ Nāthamuṉi of 'Coṭṭai' pedigree (the family name). This shows that next to Nammāḷvār, affection of such great magnitude was lavished by the Lord, only on Śrīmaṉ Nāthamuṉi and his descendants.

tāmaraik kaṇṇaṉai, viṇṇōr paravum talaimakaṉai, tuḷāy viraip
pū maruvu kaṇṇi em pirāṉai, poṉmalaiyai [alar
nām maruvi naṉku ētti uḷḷi vaṇaṅki nām makiḻntu āṭa, nāvu
pā maruvi niṟkat tanta pāṉmaiyē! vaḷḷalē! (II–6–3)

Translation

Adored by the Celestials, the lotus-eyed Lord,
My benefactor great wearing the tulacī garland,
Knit with fragrant flowers, a veritable mountain of gold,
Him even we could well extol, singing thro' songs,
by us composed,
And dancing in ecstasy, meditate and worship, how generous of Him indeed!

Notes

(i) Entranced by the sweet glances from His lotus eyes, the celestials keep singing His glory, all the time. It was indeed very generous of the Lord, as the Āḷvār would put it, that He could likewise enable even him, so low, to meditate on Him and compose songs in His praise and sing besides revealing to him, out of His own free will and grace, His exquisite beauty, bedecked with tulacī garland, ever cool, ever lovely and ever fragrant.

(ii) Reference to the Lord, as a mountain of gold, shows that He is firmly established inside the Āḷvār, firm as a rock.

vaḷḷalē! matucūtaṉā! eṉ marakata malaiyē! uṉai niṉaintu,
eḷkal tanta entāy! uṉṉai eṉṉaṉam viṭukēṉ– [ukantu,
veḷḷamē purai niṉ pukaḻ kuṭaintu āṭip pāṭik kaḷittu, ukantu
uḷḷa nōykaḷ ellām turantu, uyntu pōntiruntē? (II–6–4)

Translation

My generous Lord! Matucūtaṉā! my delectable emerald Mount!
My Sire! unto me You granted a mind, in you engrossed,
Immersed in Your oceanic traits singing in merriment
Your glory great and dancing; from all ills and evils released,
You I have attained, how shall I give you up indeed?

Note

In the preceding song, the Āḷvār was again harping on his lowliness while acknowledging the many favours done to him by the Lord. Naturally, such expressions of the Āḷvār's abject humility make the Lord ill at ease but the Āḷvār hastens to assure Him that, as the recipient of His spontaneous grace in the form of multifarious favours, he shall not give up the Lord, on any account. These favours include, of course, the removal of many an impediment in the way of their union, not the least of which is the Āḷvār's inferiority complex, even as the Lord slew the demon, Madhu. All the erstwhile miseries and shortcomings of the Āḷvār stand drowned in the rapturous enjoyment, currently going on, singing and dancing in great merriment. There is, therefore, no question of his giving up such a generous Lord.

uyntu pōntu, eṉ ulappu ilāta vem tīviṉaikaḷai nācam ceytu,
antam il aṭimai aṭaintēṉ; viṭuvēṉō– [uṉatu
aintu paintalai āṭu aravu-aṇai mēvip pāṟkaṭal yōka nittirai
cintai ceyta entāy! uṉṉaic cintai ceytu ceytē? (II–6–5)

Translation

My Sire! in thoughts of universal welfare absorbed,
You rest in the milky ocean, on Your five-hooded serpent-bed;
Meditating on You, ever and anon, I stand delivered
From my endless sins deadly and now in your perennial service ushered
Will I from you ever try to get severed?

Notes

(i) Totally absorbed, that he is, in the daily service of the Lord, the Āḻvār avers that there is no question of his giving Him up.

(ii) Ādiśeṣa (First servant) on whom the Lord rests in 'Yoga Nidrā', the highest form of psychic activity or self-activisation, is steeped in the enjoyment of perennial service unto the Lord, in many ways. Through each of his five heads, he gives vent to his joy, like the river in spate branching off into canals. Even as those under the influence of liquor dance about, Ādi-Śeṣa, intoxicated with God-love, gives expression to it by making his heads (hoods) dance with joy.

uṉṉaic cintai ceytu ceytu, uṉ neṭu mā moḻi icai pāṭi, āṭi, eṉ
muṉṉait tīviṉaikaḷ muḻu vēr arintaṉaṉ yāṉ;
uṉṉaic cintaiyiṉāl ikaḻnta iraṇiyaṉ akal mārvam kīṇṭa eṉ
muṉṉaik kōḷariyē! muṭiyātatu eṉ eṉakkē? (II–6–6)

Translation

Mighty Narasiṅka! my primordial Lord!
You split the broad chest of Iraṇiyaṉ, the demon,
Who inwardly despised you but here am I, fully delivered
From my age-long sins meditating on you, ever and anon,
Dancing and singing sweetly your glory great
Is there at all anything, this vassal of Yours cannot get?

Notes

Lord: Oh, Āḻvār! is there any thing more I can do for you?

Āḻvār: Sire! what is there I haven't got from you? My age-long sins have been rooted out, with a mind solely rivetted in you, I go on singing your great glory and dance in ecstasy. What more do I need?

The Lord is more keen to reward people than to punish them. Even if one's praise of Him is only lip-deep, the Lord generously takes it at its face value, without probing deeper and exposing the hollowness. His omniscience and omnipotence notwithstanding. On the other hand, when one throws affront at Him, He does not straightaway punish without probing whether the offence was really meant or only casual. That is why Lord Narasiṅka explored Hiraṇya kaśipu, limb by limb, joint by joint, whether there was in him any love lurking for Him anywhere inside the demon. Unfortunately, there was none and the demon had to be vanquished.

muṭiyātatu eṉ eṉakkēl iṉi? muḻu ēḻ ulakum uṇṭāṉ ukantu vantu
aṭiyēṉ uṭpukuntāṉ; akalvāṉum allaṉ iṉi;
ceṭi ār nōykaḷ ellām turantu, emar kīḻ mēl eḻu piṟappum
viṭiyā vem narakattu eṉṟum cērtal māṟiṉarē. (II–6–7)

Translation

What is there, this vassal cannot henceforth attain?
The Lord, who gulped down all the worlds seven,
Entered my mind with great relish, never again
To part from me; those unto me connected for generations,
Seven above and seven below, will from their sins dense
Be freed, and never again shall they enter the cruel abyss, bottomless.

Notes

(i) The bottomless (endless) abyss or eternal hell, referred to here, is the 'Samsāra', the stye of worldly life, in which the worldlings are wallowing, caught up in its interminable labyrinth.

(ii) In the preceding song, the Āḻvār declared that there was nothing he could not attain. When asked by some persons whether he had got everything, the Āḻvār

affirmed that the Lord's benevolent grace did not stop with him alone but extended to all those connected with him, the preceding and succeeding generations alike—that being the case, what more would he need?

māṟi māṟip pala piṟappum piṟantu, aṭiyai aṭaintu, uḷḷam tēṟi,
īṟu il iṉpattu iru veḷḷam yāṉ mūḻkiṉaṉ;
pāṟip pāṟi acurar-tam pal kuḷaṅkaḷ nīṟu eḻa, pāy paṟavai oṉṟu
ēṟi viṟṟiruntāy! uṉṉai eṉṉuḷ nīkkēl entāy! (II–6–8)

Translation

Passed I thro' several gates of birth,
From time to time and now at your lovely feet,
With a mind, pure and chaste,
Immersed am I in the bottomless ocean of mirth.
Mounted on that bird unique, leaping afar, my Sire,
Routing the Asura hordes! pray leave me never.

Notes

(i) Reference to the unique bird (Garuḍa) here is very significant. Even as the Lord presses Garuḍa into service, all the time and never gets parted from him, the Āḻvār prays that the Lord should take service from him for all time, keeping him in close proximity.

(ii) What is it that the Āḻvār did, to attain the feet of the Lord? "Absolutely nothing" is the answer. He went on, taking birth after birth, till one day, the Lord's spontaneous grace alighted on him and took him to His vicinity, like unto the twig in the mid-ocean getting washed ashore, by successive waves.

entāy! taṉ tiruvēṅkaṭattuḷ niṉṟāy! ilaṅkai ceṟṟāy! marāmaram
paintāḷ ēḻ uruva oru vāḷi kōtta villā!
kontu ār taṇ am tuḷāyiṉāy! amutē! uṉṉai eṉṉuḷḷē kuḻaitta em
maintā! vāṉ ēṟē! iṉi eṅkup pōkiṉṟatē? (II–6–9)

Translation

My Lord! gracing Tiruvēṅkaṭam, you stand on the cool mountain,
You routed Laṅkā, pierce you did the tough trees seven
With a single arrow, lovely tulacī garland, bushy and cool
You sport, my Nectar! into me dissolved you, my darling! Chief of Celestials!
Is there anywhere You can get away hence?

Note

Āḻvār to the Lord: "Unto me, who was steeped in ignorance, you revealed yourself and your excellence and worked me upto the present pitch, when I just cannot exist without you. Will it be just and proper for you to get parted from me, at this stage? As a matter of fact, you stepped on Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam, only to get hold of this vassal. Even as you routed Rāvaṇa and his Laṅkā, you eradicated my conceit and arrogance. Even as you instilled confidence in Sugrīva, before slaying his brother, Vāli, by piercing the cluster of seven 'sāl' trees, with a single arrow, you whetted my love for you by exhibiting your auspicious traits. Having mingled with me, *in toto*, without reservation of any kind, how can you at all get parted from me hereafter and where else will you go?"

The fact of the matter is that the blending of the two is so perfect that they are no longer two separate entities but just a single entity.

pōkiṉṟa kālaṅkaḷ, pōya kālaṅkaḷ, pōku kālaṅkaḷ, tāy, tantai, [uyir
ākiṉṟāy! uṉṉai nāṉ aṭaintēṉ, viṭuvēṉō?
pākiṉṟa tol pukaḻ mūvulakukkum nātaṉē! paramā! taṇ
mēkiṉṟāy taṇ-tuḷay virai nāṟu kaṇṇiyaṉē! (II–6–10) [vēṅkaṭam

Translation

Having got you, shall I ever leave you, the Super-eminent?
Lord of all the three worlds, you grace Tiruvēṅkaṭam, the cool mount,
Cool tulacī garland of fragrance sweet you do sport,
Of eternal fame, far-reaching, You are unto me dear
As Father, Mother and Soul, at all times, past, present and future.

Notes

(i) *Lord to the Āḻvār*: "Well, you are asking me, not to leave you. But my anxiety is about you, whether you might

once again run away from me, struck down, by your feeling of lowliness. Please, therefore, assure me that you will not leave me and go ".

Āḻvār to the Lord : Reply as in the stanza, above.

(ii) A doubt might be raised how the Āḻvār could talk about the benefits he would be receiving, in future, as well. Well, the Lord is the Sole Benefactor, at all times, past, present and future. After all, the present is itself, the future of the past and will, in turn, become the past of the future. Time-sequence makes no difference at all, the Lord being the constant Benefactor, at all times.

kaṇṇit taṇ am tuḻāy muṭik kamalat taṭam peruṅ kaṇṇaṉaip
naṇṇi, teṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ māṟaṉ coṉṉa [pukaḻ
eṇṇil cōrvu il antāti āyirattuḷ ivaiyum ōr pattu icaiyoṭum
paṇṇil pāṭa vallāravar kēcavaṉ tamarē. (II–6–11)

Translation

Those that sing tunefully these songs ten,
Out of the thousand composed by Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ
Scion of Māṟaṉ, singing the glory of the Lord, with large lotus-eyes,
Wearing on His crown the tulacī garland, cool and nice
Will join the rank and file of Kēcavaṉ's (the Lord's) devotees.

Note

The glory of the Lord, referred to here, in particular, is His boundless love (vyāmoha) for His devotees, like that shown unto the Āḻvār. To become His devotee, one has only to sing these ten songs, tunefully. Caste, creed and colour shall not stand in his/her way.

Second Centum—Seventh Decad (II-7)
(Kēcavaṉ tamar)

Preamble

In the seventh stanza of the last decad, the Āḻvār had mentioned that the Lord's benevolent grace did not stop with him alone but overflowed its continents and extended to all those connected with him in the preceding and succeeding generations as well. Overwhelmed by this extraordinary benevolence of the Lord the Āḻvār expatiates on it in this decad.

Of the numerous auspicious traits of the Lord extension of His love and care not only to His devotees but all those associated with them, is indeed exemplary.

After Rāvaṇa was slain by Śrī Rāma, Vibhīṣaṇa was called upon to perform the funeral rites of his brother. But then Vibhīṣaṇa demurred, saying that he would not do any such thing for such a great sinner as Rāvaṇa. Śrī Rāma (the very personification of Grace) had, however, no bitterness towards Rāvaṇa and all the bitterness was only on the part of Rāvaṇa, an one-sided affair! Now that Rāvaṇa was dead he would no longer repel Śrī Rāma's good offices, that is, if Vibhīṣaṇa performed the funeral rites at Śrī Rāma's bidding. If Vibhīṣaṇa still demurred and declined to act, Śrī Rāma would do it himself; if Vibhīṣaṇa was a brother unto Rāma, so was Rāvaṇa, as Vibhīṣaṇa's brother. There are several other instances where the Lord extended the area of His benevolence, bringing within its purview all those associated with His devotees. This is being illustrated in this Tiruvāymoḻi.

The Lord's twelve principal names, Keśava, Nārāyaṇa etc., are dealt with in these stanzas, in the same order in which these names are recited by the devotees in the course of their diurnal prayers. There are, therefore, 13 stanzas in this decad (12+1 end-song), as against the usual 11 stanzas (10+1 end-stanza).

kēcavaṉ tamar kīḻ mēl emar ēḻ eḻu piṟappum;
mā catir itu peṟṟu nammuṭai vāḻvu vaykkiṉṟavā!-
īcaṉ, eṉ karumāṇikkam, eṉ ceṅkōlak kaṇṇaṉ, viṇṇōr–
nāyakaṉ, em pirāṉ, emmāṉ nārāyaṇaṉālē. (II–7–1)

Translation

My delectable blue gem, Master of all,
Of red-lotus-eyes lovely, Chief of the Celestials,
Nārāyaṇaṉ, my Lord and Benefactor has elevated
As *Kēcava's* (His) devotees, all with me associated,

Seven generations, up and down, how grand
Is the growth of our spiritual wealth indeed!

Notes

(i) 'Kēcava' yields three meanings, viz.:

(a) One with lovely locks of hair,

(b) Slayer of Kēśi, the demon—Śrī Kṛṣṇa and

(c) Progenitor of Brahmā and Śiva.

(ii) Reference to seven generations, up and down, follows the trend in the Vedic texts.

(iii) The spiritual growth resulting from the Lord's spontaneous grace is indeed astounding; the progress made by our own efforts will but be tiny in comparison.

nāraṇaṉ; muḻu ēḻ ulakukkum nātaṉ; vēta mayaṉ;
kāraṇam, kiricai, karumam, ivai mutalvaṉ; entai;
cīr aṇaṅku amarar piṟar palarum toḻutu ētta niṉṟu
vāraṇattai maruppu ocitta pirāṉ; eṉ mātavaṉē. (II–7–2)

Translation

Nāraṇaṉ, the Supreme support of all the worlds,
Does ordain everything, Cause, effect and action; the Vedās He pervades,
And is by the exalted Celestials and all else adored;
Mātavaṉ, who the giant tusker slew, is my beneficent Lord.

Notes

(i) 'Nārāyaṇa', as a *compound, brings out the meaning that the Lord is the In-dweller of all things and creatures having name and form:

(ii) The †compound of the word reveals the Lord as sustaining the whole universe.

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* 'Bahuvrīhi'.

† 'Tatpuruṣa'.

(iii) 'Nāra' treats of the objects pervaded by the Lord; One aspect of 'ayana' spotlights the Lord as the 'Means' and another aspect reveals Him as the 'End' as well.

(iv) Of the two meanings got at above, one emphasises the Lord's transcendence (paratva) and the other, His Saulabhya (Easy accessibility), vindicated principally through His Avatāras and the connected deeds.

mātavaṉ eṉṟatē koṇṭu, eṉṉai iṉi ippāl paṭṭatu
yātu avaṅkaḷum cērkoṭēṉ eṉṟu eṉṉuḷ pukuntu iruntu,
tītu avam keṭukkum amutam; centāmaraik kaṇ-kuṉṟam;
kōtu avamil eṉ kaṉṉal-kaṭṭi; emmāṉ; eṉ kōvintaṉē. (II–7–3)

Translation

'Mātavaṉ' is a name by me casually uttered,
And yet, Kōvintaṉ my Lord, has inside me entered,
Ridding me of evils, one and all, the lotus-eyed Lord,
My nectar, Candy flawless, stands like a rock (firm and solid).

Notes

(i) 'Mādhava' is the Lord's name, most intimately associated with the Mother, Lakṣmī, meaning the 'Consort of Mā' and, for this reason, most endearing to Him. Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar tells Goddess Raṅganāyakī, enshrined in Śrīraṅgam, that the Lord is dear to the devotees because of Her association with Him (Śloka 51 of Śrī guṇaratnakośam)

In aphorism 111 of 'Ācārya Hṛdayam', the learned author high-lights the Lord's extra-liberal standards by which He gives us credit for what is known as '*ajñāta sukṛta*' (hidden or unknown merit), such as a casual mention of the word 'Mādhava' by some one, being treated by the Lord as a pious recital of His name; a mechanical naming of the sacred mountain in the South, known as 'Tirumāliruñcōlai malai, as devout remembrance of the sacred pilgrim centre and so on.

(ii) Having eradicated all the sins of the Āḻvār, root and branch, the Lord is jubilant, a fact reflected in His

effulgent Person. The Lord is free from the twin flaws of (1) expecting anything in return from His beneficiaries and (2) doing good to the devotees for their sake instead of for His own benefit. The candy which we know of, is exposed to two kinds of flaws, namely, use of faulty ingredients and faulty preparation. But the Lord is a flawless candy, which attracted the Āḻvār and kept him wholly absorbed in it.

(iii) '*Govinda, my Lord*'—The Āḻvār thinks that the Lord incarnated as Kṛṣṇa, (Govinda), only to enthrall him.

kōvintaṉ kuṭakkūttaṉ, kōvalaṉ eṉṟu eṉṟē kuṉittut
tēvum taṉṉaiyum pāṭi āṭat tirutti, eṉṉaik koṇṭu, eṉ
pāvam-taṉṉaiyum pāṟak kaittu, emar ēḻ eḻu piṟappum
mēvum taṉmaiyam ākkiṉāṉ: vallaṉ empirāṉ viṭṭuvē. (II–7–4)

Translation

Kōvintaṉ, the pot-dancer, cowherd, the Supreme Lord,
So do I His glory sing and dance, by Him enthralled
And blest, my sins were chased out and those
With me connected for generations, recipients of His grace,
He has made; how potent is Viṣṇu, my benefactor great.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār is lost in admiration of the immense prowess of Lord Viṣṇu, in redeeming him and placing him on a par with the Ever-free angels in Heaven (*Nitya Sūrīs*), a literal transformation of a base metal into gold. All his sins destroyed, he has been endowed with a mind steeped in the hilarious enjoyment of the Lord's glory. His amazing simplicity (*Saulabhya*) as Govinda and His transcendence (*Paratva*), side by side. And what more? All those connected with him, Seven generations, back and forth, have been blest likewise. They have been rendered worthy of His grace, looking upon Him as the Sole Refuge, true *to their essential nature*. Sage Vaśiṣṭa who accompanied Bharata to Chitrakūṭa to persuade Śrī Rāma to get back to Ayodhyā, told Śrī Rāma: 'ātmānaṁ nāti vartetā' This literally means 'Don't exceed yourself'. Some interpret 'ātmānam' as Bharata, dear to Rāma like his own life. Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, however, interprets it as 'Don't exceed or give up your essential nature of doing the bidding of your devotees (āṣṛta pāratantṛya)'.

(ii) 'Govinda' has been repeated twice in Śrī Viṣṇu Sahasranāma, yielding two different meanings, viz. (i) The recipient of praise and (2) The redeemer of the Earth (hidden by an Asura). The better known meaning is one possessing cows. Śrī Kṛṣṇa was coronated as 'Govinda' by Devendra, after the former's glorious protection and preservation of the pastoral life of the whole community *in tact*, by holding aloft Mount Govardhana for a whole week. This is indeed a unique wealth acquired by the Lord, come down to Earth, which cannot be had even in the Eternal Land, Śrī Vaikuṇṭha.

(iii) *Pot-dancing*: Even as the affluent Brahmins resort to the performance of 'Yāgas', the Shepherds, in affluence, indulge in sports like pot-dance-with pots piled one over the other, on the head and both the shoulders. The dancers will throw up pots alternately using both hands, without disturbing the equilibrium of the piled-up pots. Lord Kṛṣṇa, as a member of the cowherd community, naturally participated in all such sports and revelled, rather excelled!

viṭṭu ilaṅku ceñcōtit tāmarai pātam, kaikaḷ, kaṇkaḷ;
viṭṭu ilaṅku karuñ cuṭar-malaiyē tiru uṭampu;
viṭṭu ilaṅku matiyam cīr caṅku; cakkaram pariti;
viṭṭu ilaṅku muṭi ammāṉ matucūtaṉaṉ-taṉakkē. (II–7–5)

Translation

Sporting the majestic crown, exceedingly bright,
My lord, Matucūtaṉ's eyes, hands and feet are very smart,
Like the lotus, red and broad; His body like blue mount Shines,
His Conch is like the Moon bright and His discus, a veritable Sun.

Note

Tirumāḷai Āṇṭāṉ told Rāmānuja that this song reveals how the Āḷvār was attracted to the Lord through the display of His exquisite personal charms and ascribed this interpretation to his Master, Śrī Āḷavantār (Yāmuṉa). Śrī Rāmānuja was unusually quiet and when asked by the Instructor whether he had nothing to say against, as he very often did, Śrī Rāmānuja signified his approval through his broad, bewitching smile. But Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar would put it differently and say, "The song reveals the extra brilliance displayed by the Lord's person after making the Āḷvār and his associates His own". Whereas the former interpretation makes the Lord's personal charms the cause or instrument for wearing away the Āḷvār and bringing him into the Lord's fold, the latter shows it as the effect, the result of bringing the Āḷvār and his association unto the Lord's fold.

matucūtaṉai aṉṟi maṟṟu ilēṉ eṉṟu ettālum kārumam iṉṟi,
tuti cūḷnta pāṭalkaḷ pāṭi āṭa niṉṟu, ūḷi ūḷitoṟum
etir cūḷal pukku, eṉaittōr piṟappum eṉakkē aruḷkaḷ ceyya
viti cūḷntatāl: eṉakkēl ammāṉ tirivikkiramaṉaiyē. (II–7–6)

Translation

In none but Matucūtaṉ do I take refuge,
On and on I sing, as an end in itself, hymns of His glory;
This is because of Tirivikkiramaṉ's grace extraordinary,
Who took births alongside, to set me right, down the ages.

Note

The Āḷvār has passed through a staggering cycle of births. The Lord also incarnated every time, in order to get hold of the Āḷvār, but only now He could get hold of him and bring him up to the required standard. A pertinent question is asked at this stage as to why the Omnipotent Lord should not have grabbed at the Āḷvār straightaway if He was so keen on getting at him, instead of following such a tedious and time-absorbing process. No doubt, the Lord could have adopted the short-cut, suggested above, in His unbridled independence, for there is none to question Him. But an unreserved and unqualified amnesty would result in wholesale emancipation, *en masse*, which would cut across the very foundation of the Śāstras. The Lord is, therefore, on the look-out for some pretext or the other to reclaim the Subject through His extra-liberal standards. With this object, He also incarnated every time the Āḷvār was born but failed in His mission all along. Now, at long last, He has succeeded.

We can take it that this song reveals either the Lord's extreme grace or the Āḷvār's extreme humility.

tirivikkiramaṉ, centāmaraik kaṇ emmāṉ, eṉ ceṅkaṉi vāy
uruvil-polinta veḷḷaip paḷiṅku niṟattaṉaṉ eṉṟu eṉṟu uḷḷi,
paravip paṇintu pal ūḷi ūḷi niṉ pāta paṅkayamē
maruvit toḷum maṉamē tantāy: vallaikaṇ, eṉ vāmaṉaṉē.
(II–7–7)

Translation

Vāmaṉaṉ, my Lord, in just three strides you measured
The whole universe, as Tirivikkiramaṉ and in me ushered
A mind rivetted to your lotus feet, days on end adoring you,
My red lotus-eyed Master with sparkling teeth, how capable of you!

Notes

(1) *Āḷvār to the Lord*: How capable of you, how gracious! you have endowed me with a mind which adores You and sings your glory all the time as an end in itself.

(2) Śrī Nampiḷḷai has it that it was not a case of reconditioning the Āḷvār's mind so as to make it God-bent but one of fitting him with a new mind altogehter, one picked out from the Lord's strong room where valuables are stored up.

vāmaṉaṉ! eṉ marakata vaṇṇaṉ! tāmaraik kaṇṇiṉaṉ!
kāmaṉaip payantāy! eṉṟu eṉṟu uṉ kaḷal pāṭiyē paṇintu,
tū maṉattaṉaṉāyp piṟavit tuḷati niṅka, eṉṉait
tī maṉam keṭuttāy; uṉakku eṉ ceykēṉ? eṉ ciritaraṉē. (II–7–8)

Translation

Oh, Ciritaran, My Lord, You redeemed my foul mind
And rid me of life's miseries, and now with a mind pure,
I worship Your feet, Sing and adore you as the Sire
Of Kāmaṉ, Vāmaṉaṉ, my lotus-eyed Lord, the emerald mount
And so on; (this great good of Yours) how can I recompense?

Notes

(i) The Lord is referred to as the Father of Kāmaṉ (Manmatha), because He begot through Rukmiṇī Devī, a Son by name Pradhyumna of exquisite beauty, said to be an 'Amśa' or incarnation of Manmatha, the minor-deity inducing amorous love.

(ii) What was the Āḻvār's mind like before it was redeemed? Śrī Nampiḷḷai says that it was hardly fit for reconditioning, as such, erratic like the one going in for ambrosia as well as poison, feeling attracted towards God as well as the petty pleasures of the sensual world. The Lord's grace has now operated in two ways, namely, bestowal of a mind solely rivetted to the Lord's lotus feet after throwing away the *erstwhile mind*, damned beyond redemption.

ciritaraṉ, ceyya tāmaraik kaṇṇaṉ eṉṟu eṉṟu, irāppakal vāy
verii, alamantu kaṇkaḷ nīr malki, vevvuyirttu uyirttu,
mariiya tīviṉai māḷa, iṉpam vaḷara, vaikal vaikal
irii, uṉṉai eṉṉuḷ vaittaṉai; eṉ irutikēcaṉē! (II–7–9)

Translation

My (Lord) Iruṭikēcaṉ, how gracious of You indeed!
Lodged in me, every moment my joy you expand,
Having rid me of all my erstwhile sins dense;
Day and night, with hot tears in my rolling eyes,
I kept crying, Oh, Ciritaraṉ, Oh, lotus-eyed,

Note

Āḻvār to the Lord:

"I was crying out for you all the time, with tears welling up my eyes, breathing hot, but all my erstwhile miseries you

have now irrevocably cut out so that I go on enjoying you, and my joy grows by leaps and bounds every moment".

Well, this is the interpretation, current from the days of Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar who gave out this meaning. The earlier preceptors held that the Lord cut out the dense sins of the Āḻvār and made him cry out in ecstasy the Lord's names with tearful eyes, day and night, breathing hot, besides promoting this God-love of his every moment.

iruṭikēcaṉ, em pirāṉ ilaṅkai arakkar kulam
muruṭu tīrtta pirāṉ, emmāṉ, amarar pemmāṉ eṉṟu eṉṟu
teruṭiyākil, neñcē! vaṇaṅku; tiṇṇam aṟi; aṟintu,
maruṭiyēlum viṭēl kaṇṭāy! nampi-paṟpanāpaṉaiyē. (II–7–10)

Translation

My mind, if in you there's any clarity left,
Worship my Lord, Iruṭikēcaṉ, Chief of celestials aloft;
Know for certain and act, He is our Benefactor great,
Who rid Laṅkā of its tough rākśasa clan,
Shrink not from Him still, unto Paṟpanāpaṉ, the perfect, hold on.

Notes

(i) By addressing his mind in this manner the Āḻvār was only disclosing to the Lord his firm hold on Him.

(ii) Slaying the ten-headed Rāvaṇa is on a par with the redemption of the Āḻvār's mind which, aided by the five motororgans and five sense-organs, was holding fiendish sway over him, launched into the Sea of Samsāra. Śrī Nampiḷḷai likens the bestowal, on the Āḻvār, of a God-bent mind free from the devilish clutches of the senses in lieu of his erstwhile foul mind, to the destruction of Rāvaṇa and installation of Vibhīṣaṇa on the throne of Laṅkā.

(iii) The Āḻvār says unto his mind: "How can you, my mind, get out of the ken of Padmanābha, the perfect Lord with all auspicious attributes, and come to grief? The

Lord is perfect in every respect, You know, His attributes, His form exquisite and His benefaction unto us".

paṟpanāpaṉ, uyarvu aṟa uyarum perum tiṟalōṉ;
eṟparaṉ eṉṉai ākkik koṇṭu, eṉakkē taṉṉait tanta
kaṟpakam; eṉ amutam; kār mukil pōlum vēṅkaṭa nal
veṟpaṉ; vicumpōr pirāṉ; entai tāmōtaraṉē. (II–7–11)

Translation

On Paṟpanāpaṉ's navel sprouted the lotus
Whence all worlds came, of matchless prowess,
And in me wholly absorbed, He is the '*Kaṟpaka*' tree,
That yielded me and then gave itself unto me;
Chief of Celestials, Vēṅkaṭam is His favourite abode, He's my nectar,
The cloud-hued Lord, Tāmōtaraṉ is my loving Master,

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār says that the Supreme Lord, with none above Him, is also the humblest; having made the Āḻvār His vassal, the Lord is wholly absorbed in him, making it appear that He knows no one else.

(ii) The '*Kaṟpaka*' tree is the legendary wish-yielding tree. Even as there is a vast gulf between the Lord's attributes and the comparable material in each case, the Lord, taken as the '*Kaṟpaka*' tree, differs from it in the following essential respects:

(*a*) the supplicant is also the Lord's creation;
(*b*) the Supplicant gets absorbed in the Lord;
(*c*) the supplicant gets not only all that he wants but gets the Lord Himself, who is thus the extraordinary tree, giving itself to the Seeker; and
(*d*) the Lord Himself becomes the object of enjoyment by His devotees.

tāmōtaraṉai, taṉi mutalvaṉai, ñālam uṇṭavaṉai
āmō taram aṟiya oruvarkku? eṉṟē toḻum avarkaḷ
tāmōtaraṉ uru ākiya civaṟkum ticaimukaṟkum
āmō taram aṟiya-emmāṉai eṉ āḻi vaṇṇaṉaiyē. (II–7–12)

Translation

Tāmōtaraṉ, my peerless, primordial Lord,
Of oceanic hue, who devoured all the worlds,
Even exalted Ticaimukaṉ (Brahmā) and Civaṉ cannot scan and comprehend,
Though on His person they stay and worship Him
And venture to think that they can His glory fathom.

Note

The Lord cannot be comprehended through one's own effort by any one, including the exalted Brahmā and Śiva, although they stay right on His body and are inclined to be presumptuous, venturing to attempt the impossible. But He is fully comprehended by the Āḻvār and devotees like him to whom the Lord has, on His own, vouchsafed all that knowledge, clear and concise, full and complete. The Lord who is the causeless cause, the Progenitor of the entire Universe, combines in Him the triple aspects unknown to many, namely, (1) He is the vassal of His devotees, (2) He is the originator of the Universe and (3) the friend-in-need, succouring one and all, in times of distress. Even the Āḻvār cannot fully comprehend the many favours done to him by the Lord, although one so great, had disclosed to the Āḻvār, so low, the vast array of His oceanic traits, like compressing an ocean inside the tiny mustard.

vaṇṇa mā maṇic cōtiyai, amarar talaimakaṉai,
kaṇṇaṉai, neṭumālait teṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
paṇṇiya tamiḻ-mālai āyirattuḷ ivai paṉṉiraṇṭum
paṇṇil paṉṉiru nāmap pāṭṭu aṇṇal-tāḷ aṇaivikkumē. (II–7–13)

Translation

These tuneful songs on the Lord's twelve names, numbering a dozen,
Out of the thousand Tamil hymns yielded by Teṉkurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
Setting out the love, intense and unlimited, of Kaṇṇaṉ,

Lustrous like the blue gem grand, Chief of *Amarars* (celestials)
(Unto His devotees), will unto the Sire's feet bind (the chanters).

Note

In this end-stanza, the Lord's love, intense and unlimited, for His devotees is emphasised. This provides the impetus for the Lord looking upon His devotees as His sole objects of enjoyment. Contact with this decad (Tiruvāymoḻi) is enough to render one, such a beloved devotee of Lord Kēcavaṉ.

Second Centum—Eighth decad (11-8) (Aṇaivatu Aravu-aṇaimēl)

Preamble

In the last decad, the Āḻvār was overwhelmed by the Lord's extraordinary benevolence which did not stop with him alone but overflowed its continents and extended to those connected with him, seven generations, back and forth. In other words, the heavenly bliss enjoyed by the '*Nityās*' in Heaven could be shared by him and his associates, right here. In his boundless compassion for the suffering humanity, caught up in the vortex of worldly life and sensual pleasures, the Āḻvār would naturally like to seize this golden opportunity and get the area of benevolence extended, by getting the '*Samsārīs*' (worldlings) also associated with him as fellow-devotees. And so, he turns round and advises them to get into the Divine fold, seeing that the Lord is the one and only granter of Mokṣa, the final bliss, ridding them of the terrific involvement in worldly life, with its dreadful cycle of birth and death. It may be recalled that, once before, vide I-2, the Āḻvār addressed the fellow-beings with whom he wished to share all that exalted knowledge about the Divine order, imparted to him by a self-revealing God.

The earlier Ācāryas had held that, in this decad, the Āḻvār propagates the Lord's Supremacy. But Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar was inclined to think that the Lord's prowess of granting 'Mokṣa' is being talked about in this decad. As a matter of fact, the Lord's Supremacy has been dealt with in this very centum, in the Second decad, and there is no need to repeat it here so soon. Further, this decad is replete with expressions relating to the grant of Mokṣa.

In any case, it makes no difference either way, as God-head ('*Īśvara-tva*) and the prerogative of granting Mokṣa (*Mokṣa-pradatva*) go hand in hand, vested solely in the Supreme Lord.

Towards the end of this decad, as can be seen from stanza ten, the Āḻvār, however, feels frustrated by the unresponsive world around, jogging on in just the same way as before, all his advice having fallen on deaf ears, like the advice tendered by Mālyavāṉ and others to Rāvaṇa. The Āḻvār would, therefore, profitably revert to the enjoyment of the Lord as before, which got interrupted for a while because of his misplaced sympathy for those around, totally impervious to his wholesome advice. At the same time, it was no mean consolation for him that, in the process, he escaped getting contaminated by them and becoming one of them. Great indeed is his jubilation that he could still retain, *in tact*, the priceless wealth of God-love and God-enjoyment, like that of a person who clears a dacoit-infested area without being robbed and molested.

aṇaivatu aravu-aṇaimēl; pūmpāvai ākam
puṇarvatu; iruvar avar mutalum tāṉē;
iṇaivaṉ ām ep poruṭkum; vīṭu mutal ām–
puṇaivaṉ piṟavikkaṭal nīntuvārkkē. (II–8–1)

Translation

The Supreme Lord who does on serpent-bed repose
And hold Pūmpāvai (Lakṣmī, the lotus-born) in embrace
Is Progenitor of them both (Brahmā and Śiva); He freely descends
Among all and sundry, Granter of Mokṣa, the raft (sure and certain)
He is, to swim across (Samsāra) the difficult and dreadful ocean.

Notes

(i) This stanza is an epitome of the contents of this decad.

(ii) The first two lines of the stanza bring out the setting in the Eternal land of absolute bliss (*Nitya Vibhūti*). So far as the "*Līla Vibhūti* (Sportive Universe) is concerned, the Lord is depicted as the originator of one and all, including those two calling for special attention, the

exalted Brahmā and Rudra and yet He incarnates among all and sundries, as if He is of their own species and mingles with them freely.

Being the granter of Mokṣa, He is the raft, safe and sound, to get hold of for those who are keen on crossing the ocean of 'Samsāra' with its terrific involvement in the cycle of birth and death and seek His help, finding that, by themselves, they can hardly cross this ocean, vast and deep.

nīntum tuyarp piṟavi uṭpaṭa maṟṟu ev evaiyum
nīntum; tuyar illā vīṭu mutal ām:
pūn taṉ puṉal-poykai yāṉai iṭar kaṭinta
pūn taṉ-tuḻāy eṉ taṉi nāyakaṉ puṇarppē. (II–8–2)

Translation

Contact with my unique Lord, wearing tulacī garland
Cool and nice, the Redeemer of the elephant,
In great distress, in the cool and lovely pond,
Will help to ford " Samsāra ', the dreadful ocean,
The breeder of all ills and attain the blissful heaven.

Notes

(i) In this stanza, the Āḻvār says that the Lord, as such, is not necessary for the attainment of Mokṣa and some kind of contact with Him will suffice. Such a contact will help one both ways, namely, obtaining relief from the otherwise incurable maladies of birth etc, and attaining the 'Eternal Land' of absolute bliss without the slightest tinge of sorrow.

(ii) Swimming across the ocean of *Samsāra* is a never-ending process; if the ocean is interminably vast, the swimming also is interminably long, a perennial process. It is only the Lord's redemptive grace flowing through contact with Him, in some form, that will cut the gordian knot and take one out of this otherwise unfordable ocean.

puṇarkkum ayaṉ ām; aḻikkum araṉ ām;
puṇartta taṉ untiyoṭu ākattu maṉṉi:
puṇartta tiruākit taṉ mārvil tāṉ cēr
puṇarppaṉ perum puṇarppu eṅkum pulaṉē. (II–8–3)

Translation

The Lord is (also) 'Ayaṉ' who from His navel emerged
And created the worlds, on His person duly lodged,
And 'Araṉ', the destroyer too; on His winsome chest
There's Tiru; perceptible indeed are His herculean tasks many.

Note

The Supreme Lord not only discharges the functions of 'Ayaṉ' (Brahmā), the Creator and 'Araṉ' (Śiva), the destroyer, standing within them as their Internal Controller but also assigns specific portions of His body for their occupation. And then, there is 'Tiru' (Lakṣmī), inseparably lodged on His winsome chest. And then, He reposes on the vast expanse of water, contemplating the ensuing creation of the universe. The herculean deeds performed by Him through Brahmā and Rudra and on His own, are most perceptible indeed.

pulaṉ aintu mēyum poṟi aintum nīṅki,
nalam antam illatu ōr nāṭu pukuvīr!
alamantu vīya acuraraic ceṟṟāṉ
palam muntu cīril paṭimiṉ ōvātē. (II–8–4)

Translation

Those of you who the interplay want to quell,
Of the senses and sense-objects, so as to enter
The Eternal Land of perfect bliss, will do well
To enjoy the traits auspicious of the Lord, for ever;
How He tortured and slew the Asuras, think it over.

Notes

(i) Here is the Āḻvār's recipe for discarding the sensual pleasures, petty and transient, and entering the Eternal Land of perfect bliss:

" Be steeped in the enjoyment of His auspicious traits for ever ".

(ii) Unlike several other processes which are difficult and tiresome in the initial stages and are pleasurable only in the final stages of fruition, contemplation of the Lord's auspicious traits is an ecstatic experience, right from the beginning. It is also noteworthy that there are no inhibitions and injunctions restricting such enjoyment to certain days only or parts of the day as in the case of sea-bath etc.

(iii) This abode of ours is the harrowing land of eternal miseries whereas the Heaven is just the opposite—the Eternal Land of absolute bliss. The Āḻvār does not subscribe to the doctrine of philosophy which conceives of 'Mokṣa', as but the mere disembodiment of the soul on emancipation from the cycle of births and deaths. His concept of 'Mokṣa' is the eternal joy of constant service unto the Lord, in the yonder heaven, with no tinge of the erstwhile sorrows, partaking of the bliss of unlimited dimensions, fresh and exquisite, every moment, flowing from the Lord who is an inexhaustible fountain of bliss.

(iv) The Lord will destroy our sins and remove all impediments in the way of our union with Him, even as He tormented and destroyed the Asuras.

ōvāt tuyarp piṟavi uṭpaṭa maṟṟu ev evaiyum
mūvāt taṉi mutalāy mūvulakum kāvalōṉ,
mā āki, āmai āy, mīṉ āki, māṉiṭam ām—
tēvāti tēva perumāṉ eṉ tīrttaṉē. (II–8–5)

Translation

The Supreme Lord, the causeless cause of the flowing universe, Its creation, sustentation and destruction, Chief of the Celestials, My Tīrttaṉ (Who sanctified me) did come down as a Horse, Tortoise, Fish and Man, and protected the worlds, one and all.

Note

The routine of the Universe falling under the three major compartments of creation, preservation and dissolution, goes on uninterruptedly because of the ever-alert and omnipotent Lord who directs and controls them all. No doubt, He dowered on all of us, limbs and sense-organs to put us on a career of gainful activity with a view to attaining Him, but even if we stray away from Him He is such an indefatigable cultivator who doesn't lose heart when the yield is low or next to nothing, but goes on with His cultivation, hoping for better days. That is why He takes all the trouble to incarnate in various forms and goes on with His work of resuscitation.

tīrttaṉ ulaku aḷanta cēvaṭimēl pūntāmam
cērtti, avaiyē civaṉ muṭimēl tāṉ kaṇṭu,
pārttan teḷintoḻinta paintuḻāyāṉ perumai
pērttum oruvarāl pēcak kiṭantatē? (II–8–6)

Translation

Is there any need at all for others to deliberate
The glory of (Lord Kṛṣṇa) wearing tulacī garland, Tīrttaṉ (The Immaculate),
At whose lovely feet which spanned the Universe, Pārttaṉ placed a garland
And saw it (a little later) on Śiva's head, getting clarity of mind?

Note

In the battle against the "Kauravas", Arjuṉa needed the weapon known as 'Pāśupada astra' which could be had from Śiva after due propitiation. The compassionate Kṛṣṇa, however, told Arjuṉa the short-cut whereby he could offer at the former's feet the garland intended for Paśupati (Śiva). Arjuṉa did accordingly and that very night, Śiva appeared in Arjuṉa's dream, wearing that very same garland on the head and presented the weapon in question. Reference has been made, in this song, to the spanning of the whole Universe by the Lord as it was then that Brahmā washed the Lord's feet to the accompaniment of Vedic chantings, and the sacred water that flowed down the Lord's feet was held by Śiva on his head (Nāṉmukaṉ Tiruvantāti-9). Is there at all any need to dispute the self-evident glory of Lord Kṛṣṇa?

kiṭantu iruntu, ninṟu, aḷantu, kēḻal āy, kīḻp pukku
iṭantiṭum; tannuḷ karakkum; umiḻum;
taṭam perun tōḷ ārat taḻuvum; pār ennum
maṭantaiyai māl ceykinṟa māl ār kāṇpārē? (II–8–7)

Translation

Lying, sitting and standing, measuring the worlds,
Getting into the waters deep and lifting up the Earth,
As the Boar gigantic, holding with Him all the worlds
And then spitting them out, embracing dame Earth
On His broad shoulders complacent, who can comprehend His love for Mother earth?

Notes

(i) Many indeed are the wondrous deeds of the Lord, done out of His great love for Mother Earth, the Sportive universe (*Līlā vibhūti*).

(ii) *Lying, sitting and standing*:

There are several ways of appreciating these postures of the Lord. These are set out below:

(*a*) *Reclining* on the Milk-ocean, the centre of creative activity, surrounded by the band of celestials;

Sitting on the serpent couch in the High Heaven; and *standing* firm on Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam, His favourite resort.

(*b*) *Lying* prostrate in front of the Ocean, Śrī Rāma's supplication to the king of the ocean;

Sitting (Staying) in the Āśramas of the Maharṣīs during His exile;

and *standing* victorious at the gates of Laṅkā after slaying Rāvaṇa (may also refer to Śrī Rāma standing victorious after slaying vāli).

(*c*) *Lying* in the pilgrim centre known as Puḷiṅkuṭi.
Sitting in the pilgrim centre known as Varakuṇamaṅkai.

and *Standing* in the pilgrim centre known as *Śrīvaikuṇṭam*.

(*a*) above refers to the Lord's transcendent glory;

(*b*) above refers to the Lord's 'Saulabhya' (easy accessibility) in His Incarnate form,

(*c*) refers to the Lord's iconic manifestation in these different postures in the respective pilgrim centres. See also notes under V-10-6.

kāṇpār ār em īcan kaṇṇanai? en kāṇumāṟu?
ūṇ pēcil, ellā ulakum ōr tuṟṟu āṟṟā:
cēṇ pāla vīṭō, uyirō, maṟṟu ep poruṭkum
ēṇ pālum cōrāṇ, parantu uḷan ām eṅkumē. (II–8–8)

Translation

Who can comprehend Kaṇṇan, my Lord
Or get at the know-how? hardly a morsel
Of His food can all the worlds be, His abode
Is high above the worlds, Inner Controller of all,
Indeed He pervades all over
With no exception whatever.

Notes

(i) It is indeed impossible for any one to gauge the full extent of the Lord's glory; even the exalted ones who are endowed with the capacity to delve into it, are not equal to the task. They too could touch only a fringe of it, just a peep, and no more.

(ii) All along, reference was made to the Lord containing within His stomach, eating up all the worlds, during the period of deluge, making it appear to be a herculean task of gigantic magnitude. Now, it will be seen that all the worlds put together hardly constitute a morsel of food for the Lord, a mere fleebite.

eṅkum uḷan kaṇṇan enṟa makanaik kāyntu,
iṅku illaiyāl enṟu iraṇiyan tūṇ puṭaippa,
aṅku appoḻutē avan vīyat tōnṟiya en
ciṅkap pirān perumai ārāyum cīrmaittē? (II–8–9)

Translation

The son affirmed, ' Kaṇṇan is everywhere ',
Shouted back irate Iraṇiyan, " If he be not here? "
And slapped the pillar hard; there and then
The Lord appeared and killed the demon;
Indeed, my Naracinka's glory is beyond deliberation.

Notes

(i) In the preceding Song, the Lord's immanence was referred to. Perhaps, it didn't carry conviction with quite a few persons who doubted whether the Lord could pervade all over, in and out. This song is evidently addressed to those persons, warning them not to follow in the foot-steps of Hiraṇya and come to grief.

(ii) Hiraṇya slapped, with his own hand, a pillar built under his own supervision. There was, therefore, hardly any question of magic or sleight of hand which produced the furious Narasinga, right from the bosom of that very pillar, from the very spot on which Hiraṇya slapped that very moment. The points to be pondered over in this context are: Had the Lord not appeared from the crucial spot tapped by Hiraṇya or if His appearance had been delayed by even a split second, His immanence at all places and at all times would be open to question. His omnipresence having been established, His omnipotence needs to be demonstrated. If it is said that Narasinga was born, He was not born in the generally accepted sense of impregnation, birth, growth and all that. He jumped out of the ripped-open pillar, as a full- grown adult, a peculiar combination of Man and Lion, more than a match for the formidable Hiraṇya. Strange indeed were the boons conferred on Hiraṇya by Brahmā—the devil was not to meet with death at the hands of a male, female or a hermophrodite, neither by Gods nor by man or beast or any of the five elements, neither by day nor by night, neither in space nor on the ground, neither inside the house nor outside, so on and so forth. The Strange Visitor who sprang forth engaged Hiraṇya, in a *hand to hand fight*, dragged him on to the *door-step*, laid him on His *lap* and tore open his bowels with the *finger nails* (spear-like claws), at *dusk*. Hiraṇya, the seemingly impregnable fortress, armed in a thousand and one ways against every conceivable source of danger, crashed, at long last, before the superior might of the Omnipotent Lord. The words in italics, as above, will show that none of the boons granted to Hiraṇya was violated.

cīrmai koḷ vīṭu cuvarkkam naraku īṟā,
īrmai koḷ tēvar naṭuvā, maṟṟu ep poruṭkum
vēr mutal āy, vittu āy, parantu taṉi niṉṟa
kār mukilpōl vaṇṇaṉ, eṉ kaṇṇaṉai nāṉ kaṇṭēṉē. (II–8–10)

Translation

Seen have I kaṇṇaṉ, my cloud-hued Lord, of unique excellence,
All pervading, He is the triple cause of all existence,
Ushering in the exalted Heaven, Svarg and hell, the respective
denizens,
The kind-hearted Devas and all else.

Notes

(i) As already mentioned in the preamble to this decad, the Āḻvār finds, at this stage, the people around, most unresponsive, all his advice having fallen on deaf ears. Frustrated though, he is still happy that he didn't get contaminated by them and become one of them, very much like clearing a dacoit-infested area without getting robbed or molested.

(ii) The Lord combines in Himself all the three causes of existence, the *material* (upādāna) *Instrumental* (Sahakāri) and the *operative* (nimitta) causes. For making pots, mud is the material cause, the potter's wheel and staff, the Instrumental cause, and the Potter is the operative cause. So far as the creation of this world is concerned, all the three causes vest in the Lord, yet another unique feature of the Lord. Apart from this universal aspect, the Lord regales the denizens of the high heaven with the exquisite charm of His transcendent Form, and

He has now chosen to present Himself unto the Āḻvār as the charming Kṛṣṇa. Great indeed is the Āḻvār's joy.

kaṇ-talaṅkaḷ ceyya karu mēṉi ammāṉai
vaṇṭu alampum cōlai vaḻuti vaḷa nāṭaṉ
paṇ-talaiyil coṉṉa tamiḻ āyirattu ip pattum valār
viṇ-talaiyil vīṟṟiruntu āḷvar em mā vīṭē. (II–8–11)

Translation

Those that learn these songs ten
Out of the thousand composed in choice tunes,
By (Caṭakōpaṉ), Chief of Vaḻutināṭu, abounding in fertile orchards,
Where go gay honey bees in their swarms,
Adoring the black-hued, large lotus-eyed Lord,
Will in high Heaven flourish and partake of bliss supreme.

Note

The chanters of this decad will shoot up from the harrowing depths of worldly existence to an exalted position in heaven, keeping at their beck and call, the denizens over there.

Second Centum—Ninth decad (II-9)
(Em mā vīṭṭu)

Preamble

This decad pinpoints the concept of '*Puruṣārtha*' the ultimate value of the final goal of every individual. In the preceding decad, frequent references were made by the Āḻvār to the Eternal Land of absolute bliss. On hearing these, the Lord thought He would rather put the Āḻvār in Heaven if that was all His desire and accordingly told him, "Well, you can have the Mokṣa, as desired". It is now and here that the position gets crystallised. The Āḻvār revolves in his mind and concludes that any thing granted by the Lord, by way of catering to his desire instead of His own, is not worth having, and even heaven attained this way, would be little better than hell. The real '*Puruṣārtha*', or ultimate value

lies in whatever is bestowed by the Lord out of His own free grace and liking. And so, the Āḻvār speaks out his mind, as follows:

"My Lord, it makes absolutely no difference to me whether I am in heaven as the partaker of the endless bliss there or in the state of *Kaivalya*, lost in self-enjoyment or get consigned to the gloomy abyss, if it is all your sweet will and dispensation. On the other hand, I will not hesitate to decline even the gift of heaven, if it is bestowed on me just for my gratification. And so, may it please you to so ordain my goal as to make it coincide solely with your desire". Here is a clear enunciation of the paramountcy of the Lord's will, in total subjugation of the egoistic compulsions of the Individual. It is indeed very hard to find the Subject who can appreciate and fall in line with the Āḻvār's lofty train of thought, totally bereft of egoistic impulses and putting his whole weight on the Lord. It was for this very reason that Empār, the great preceptor, is said to have screened his audience and closed the gates of the lecture hall before discoursing on this decad.

em mā vīṭṭut tiṟamum ceppam; niṉ
cem mā pāta-paṟput talai cērttu; ollai
kaimmā tuṉpam kaṭinta pirāṉē!
ammā! aṭiyēṉ vēṇṭuvatu ītē. (II–9–1)

Translation

You relieved the distress of an elephant, benevolent Lord!
If you'd only soon set your grand lotus feet red
On my head, the topic of high heaven I shall not moot,
Sire, this is all I pray for, nothing more do I want.

Note

Right in the beginning of this song, the Āḻvār makes his position abundantly clear. He shall no longer mention about the high heaven, be it a matter of assuming a form like unto that of God (Sārūpya), staying in the same area as the seat of the Lord's kingdom in heaven (sālokya) etc. All that he needs is that the Lord should set His lovely pair of red lotus feet on his head.

ītē yāṉ uṉṉaik koḷvatu eññāṉṟum; eṉ
mai tōy cōti maṇivaṇṇa! entāy!
eytā niṉ kaḻal yāṉ eyta ñāṉak
kai tā; kālak kaḻivu ceyyēlē. (II–9–2)

Translation

My lovely Lord, lustrous like the dark blue gem,
All that I pray unto you now and at all times,
Is that you do lend me the hand of wisdom,
To reach your feet, difficult to attain, with no loss of time.

Notes

(i) In the preceding song, the Āḻvār had categorically stated that he wanted nothing more than the Lord's lovely pair of lotus feet being set firmly on his head. And yet, the Lord tempts the Āḻvār and asks him whether he would want anything more. The Āḻvār, however, stands his ground, all right and reaffirms that he wants nothing else.

Lord : Well, how long will you persevere in this attitude?"

Āḻvār : "As long as you and I exist".

Lord : "What made you so steadfast?"

Āḻvār : "Your exquisite charm".

Lord : "And what should I do now?"

Āḻvār : "Pray, deign to make this vassal, your sole dependent, get at your lovely pair of feet, difficult to attain".

(ii) About the lending of the hand of wisdom, here is an anecdote, very instructive.

Mutaliyāṇṭāṉ and Empār were colleagues and co-disciples of Śrī Rāmānuja. During a fairly long spell of absence of the former from Śrīraṅgam, a disciple of his stayed with Empār. One of those days, quite a few disciples of Empār were administered by him the five-fold sacraments enjoined for Śrī vaiṣṇavas. The aforesaid disciple of Mutaliyāṇṭāṉ also got the sacraments from Empār along with the others. To an enquiry by Empār, whether the disciple in question had spiritual relationship with any other Preceptor, the answer was assuring enough and indicated that there was no other spiritual mentor. But then, when Mutaliyāṇṭāṉ returned to Śrīraṅgam, this particular disciple went back to him, and served him as before. When Empār got to know of this, he hurried to Mutaliyāṇṭāṉ and expressed regret for the administration of the Sacraments to the disciple in question during Āṇṭāṉ's absence from the station. But Āṇṭāṉ's magnanimity put Empār at ease, in no time. The former observed: "If two persons stretch out their hands to one fallen into a well, it is so much the easier both for the riser and the raisers". The helping hand, in this case, refers to the spiritual knowledge imparted by both the preceptors.

ceyyēl tīviṉai eṉṟu aruḷ ceyyum eṉ
kai ār cakkarak kaṇṇa-pirāṉē!
ai ār kaṇṭam aṭaikkilum, niṉ kaḻal
eyyātu ētta aruḷcey eṉakkē. (II–9–3)

Translation

Kaṇṇā, my benefactor, wielding the discus bright,
'Tis your grace that I from evil deeds desist;
Bless me that I shall adore, without respite,
Your comely feet even when phlegm chokes my throat tight.

Note

Āḻvār to the Lord: "I pray not for relief from sufferings but for a mind rivetted to your feet at all times, even in those dark moments when the throat gets choked by phlegm".

C.f. the 12th Jitante śloka (recited at the conclusion of the worship of the household Deity)

Which means:

"Whatever calamities might befall me, let not my mind be apart from you: this would be enough to salve me".

eṉakkē āṭcey ek kālattum eṉṟu, eṉ
maṉakkē vantu iṭaivītu iṉṟi maṉṉi,
taṉakkē āka eṉaik koḷḷum īte:
eṉakkē kaṇṇaṉai yāṉ koḷ ciṟappē. (II–9–4)

Translation

The greatest good I desire from Kaṇṇaṉ, my Lord,
True to my essential nature, is that command He shall,
That I serve Him wholly and at all times, and own He shall
Me as His exclusive vassal, in my mind firmly lodged.

Notes

(i) This song is the quintessence of this decad, determining, as it does, the greatest good for the individual soul, in keeping with its essential nature, namely, abject dependence on the Lord as His exclusive vassal for all time. For abiding in such a state without the slightest aberration at any time, the Āḻvār seeks the Lord's Grace.

(ii) Śrī Nampiḷḷai appreciates this decad as the most outstanding, of all the hundred decads (Tiruvāymoḻis) and even so, this song is the best, in this decad, That is because the Āḻvār prays unto the Lord that He should stay inside him, firm and for ever, and take from him service, service exclusively unto Him and at all times, rendered solely for His pleasure, eschewing the slightest tinge of personal egoism, absolutely selfless like the Moon, Southerly breeze, sandal paste and water.

(iii) In the learned assembly presided over by Empār, Piḷḷai Tirunarayūr Arayar enquired why the Āḻvār, endowed with full and complete knowledge, clear and concise, should at all make a request of this kind to the Lord, instead of resigning himself wholly to His grace, leaving Him to do whatever He liked. While agreeing with the Arayar that it was a pertinent question, Empār elucidated that it was the innate charm of the destined goal, namely, selfless service unto the Lord for His exclusive enjoyment that drew the Āḻvār out in this manner and made him long for it, even as the Divine Mother, inseparably poised on the Lord's winsome chest, keeps on saying, "I shall not get parted from my Lord even for a trice".

ciṟappil vītu cuvarkkam narakam
iṟappil eytuka, eytaṟka; yāṉum
piṟappu il pal piṟavip perumāṉai,
maṟappu oṉṟu iṉṟi, eṉṟum makiḻvaṉē. (II–9–5)

Translation

Let me or let me not go, after death,
To the renowned heaven, the svarg or the hell,
But may I meditate upon the Lord, Who, though free from birth,
Chooses to take many a birth, in an unbroken spell,
Forgetting Him at no time and thus be full of mirth.

Note

The Āḻvār's sole concern is to remain steeped for ever in the enjoyment of the Lord's wondrous deeds and auspicious traits, displayed during the numerous incarnations taken at His sweet volition.

makiḻ koḷ teyvam, ulōkam, alōkam,
makiḻ koḷ cōti malarnta ammāṉē!
makiḻ koḷ cintai col ceykai koṇṭu eṉṟum
makiḻvuṟṟu uṉṉai vaṇaṅka vārāyē. (II–9–6)

Translation

Oh, Lord, from You blossomed the mirthful Moon and the Sun resplendent,
The blissful Celestials, mankind with Knowledge radiant,
The fauna and flora with no such radiance, pray appear before me
That I may worship you ever, by word, deed and thought gaily.

Note

Āḻvār to the Lord: My Lord, you made the celestials, full of bliss, the mankind, radiant with knowledge, the luminous

Sun and Moon as well as the non-sentient beings, devoid of knowledge. You, who could create this Kaleidoscopic Universe, can surely make me enjoy you wholly, by word, deed and thought and, for this purpose, you should be before me, at all times.

vārāy! un tirup pāta malarkkīḻp
pērātē yāṉ vantu aṭaiyumpaṭi:
tārātāy! uṉṉai yeṉṉuḷ vaippil eṉṟum
ārātāy! eṉakku eṉṟum ekkālē. (II–9–7)

Translation

Oh, Lord, You haven't granted me the favour
Of attaining your lotus feet for ever;
However long I wrap You in my mind, non-satiate you are,
Pray appear before me, for my eyes to feast for ever.

Note

The Āḻvār feels that, having whetted his God-thirst and God-hunger, it was but meet that the Lord should appear before him for his eyes to continually drink deep of His nectarean beauty.

ekkālattu entaiyāy eṉṉuḷ maṉṉil, maṟṟu
ek kālattilum yātoṉṟum vēṇṭēṉ;
mikkār vēta vimalar viḻuṅkum eṉ
akkārak kaṉiyē! uṉṉai yāṉē. (II–9–8)

Translation

You, Vedic scholars of rank and repute do (with love) devour,
Oh, my candy- fruit, my eternal Master,
If you shall my mind enter and stay there, firm and secure,
Never shall I from you seek any other favour, (be sure).

Notes

(i) Rock-candy is a delicious product of cane-juice and it is the Āḻvār's figment of imagination that conceives of the Lord being as delicious as the fruit of the imaginary Rock-candy tree. (akkārakkaṉi is the term used in the original text of this song, to denote this imaginary fruit of an imaginary tree).

(ii) The versification, as above, conforms to the interpretation of this song (original) by ' Emperumāṉār (Rāmānuja). Śrī Āḷavantār (Yāmuṉa) would, however, appear to have interpreted this song, as follows:

" My Lord, if you would only enter my heart, as my Sovereign Master, even if it be for a split second, I shall not seek from you any favour, at any other time, not even this very favour now sought ".

yāṉē eṉṉai aṟiyakilātē,
yāṉē eṉ-taṉatē eṉṟu iruntēṉ;
yāṉē nī; eṉ uṭaimaiyum nīyē;
vāṉē ēttum em vāṉavar ēṟē! (II–9–9)

Translation

Oh, my Lord, by the entire heaven adored!
Chief of Celestials, Fancied I, in ignorance bred,
I my master was and all things mine own;
But now do I realise, all are yours, I and mine.

Note

The Lord had done His best, down the ages, to reclaim the Āḻvār but the latter was striking a divergent path all the time, not knowing his essential nature and relationship with God. Prior to his reclamation, the Āḻvār was like unto a Prince, fallen into the hands of a hunter and brought up like the hunter's son in strange environments, totally alien to his native surroundings. But now true knowledge has dawned on him and he is in a position to advise the people around to disengage themselves from the erroneous notions of ' I ' and ' Mine ' and be rooted in the Lord, whose exclusive vassals they are, solely dependent on Him.

ēṟēl ēḻum veṉṟu, ēr koḷ ilaṅkaiyai
nīṟē ceyta neṭuñ cuṭarc cōti!
tēṟēl eṉṉai; uṉ poṉ-aṭi cērttu ollai;
vēṟē pōka eññāṉṟum viṭalē. (II–9–10)

Translation

My resplendent Lord; you tamed the seven bulls unruly
And routed Laṅkā, the city beautiful; trust me not,
Better take me quick to your golden feet
And never allow me to slip back to things worldly.

Note

Lord : Āḻvār, I suppose you are quite safe now and have nothing more to fear."

Āḻvār : "Sire, you can't be too certain about me, still in this material body, and in these frightful surroundings. Situated as I am, the possibility of my going astray and slipping back to old ways cannot be ruled out. I cannot, therefore, feel safe unless and until I am laid at your feet firmly. To get at me, you can of course root out the impediments even as you tamed the unruly bulls and destroyed Laṅkā, to get at Nappiṉṉai and Sīta respectively.

viṭal il cakkarattu aṇṇalai mēval
viṭal il vaṇ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
keṭal il āyirattuḷ ivai pattum
keṭal il vīṭu ceyyum kiḷarvārkkē. (II–9–11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the thousand immortal songs
Of Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ, ever close to the Lord,
Who the discus inseparable holds, will unto those that sing
Them ardently, bestow heavenly bliss, from all ills freed.

Notes

(i) These ten stanzas will confer on those who recite them heavenly bliss. It need not be questioned how these songs could, by themselves, grant Mokṣa, which is the sole prerogative of the Supreme Lord. What is intended to be conveyed by this end-song is that the recital of these ten songs will gladden the Lord and, as a consequence thereof, His gift of Mokṣa will follow. C.f. IV-5-11 where the lotus-born Lakṣmī is said to confer Mokṣa on those who recite the ten tanzas in that decad. Actually, the Lord is the sole Granter of Mokṣa but He grants it only through the instrumentality of Śrī Lakṣmī, as the Grand Intercessor between Man and God and her recommendatory role plays a very vital part in the ascent of Man to the foot-stool of God.

(ii) In the last song, the Āḻvār had requested the Lord not to let him slip back to his old ways. The Lord assured the Āḻvār that he need have no misgivings whatsoever and added that it was not for giving up devotees like him that He was carrying in His hand the discus all the time. By implication, He could hold on to His devotee as firmly as He held the discus.

Second centum–Tenth decad (II-10)
(Kiḷar oḷi iḷamai)

Preamble

In the last decad, the Āḻvār stressed the need for quick action on the part of the Lord, while praying that He should take service from him, at all times. The Āḻvār's agitation for expeditious result was, however, construed by the Lord as the Āḻvār's desire to serve in this body itself and He, therefore, directed the Āḻvār to serve Him in His Iconic Form in Tirumāliruñcōlai malai (very near to Maturai in the South), a nice, quiet place, abounding in lovely hills and beautiful orchards. The Āḻvār accordingly enjoys alike the pilgrim centre and the Lord enshrined there, his predilections extending even to the other hills, in and around, and the very route leading thereto.

kiḷar oḷi iḷamai keṭuvataṉ muṉṉam,
vaḷar oḷi māyōṉ maruviya kōyil,
vaḷar iḷam poḻil cūḻ māliruñcōlai
taḷarvu ilar ākic cārvatu catirē. (II–10–1)

Translation

Ere the youth, up and radiant, gets blasted
'Tis but meet that one reaches with a mind steadfast,

Māliruñcōlai, the hill resort, full of orchards,
Young and lovely, where stays always the wondrous Lord
Of (growing splendour and) mounting radiance.

Notes

(i) Even reaching the holy place, ' Tirumāliruñcōlai Malai ', is an end in itself, says the Āḻvār. Even as one is advised to acquire knowledge when still young so as to reap the benefit thereof, in later years, one is advised to go to this pilgrim centre while still young and before the sensual pleasures get hold of the rising youth and distract it.

(ii) There is nothing like growth or diminution, waxing or waning for the Lord Who is immutable and yet, His Splendour is said to grow by virtue of the exhilarating impact of this lovely station on the Lord. This is sheer poetic grandeur extolling the beauty of the place.

(iii) This is one of the four principal Vaiṣṇava Pilgrim centres, the other three being Śrīraṅgam, Tirumalai and Kāñcīpuram.

catir iḻa maṭavār tāḻcciyai matiyātu,
atir kural caṅkattu aḻakar-tam kōyil,
mati tavaḻ kuṭumi māliruñcōlaip
patiyatu ētti eḻuvatu payaṉē. (II–10–2)

Translation

Better ignore the viles and charms of damsels young
And on Māliruñcōlai, meditate for your good;
The Moon walks on its tops and the conch keeps blowing
In the temple of Aḻakar, our Lord.

payaṉ alla ceytu payaṉ illai, neñcē!
puyal malai vaṇṇar purintu uṟai kōyil,
mayal miku poḻil cūḻ māliruñcōlai
ayalmalai aṭaivatu atu karumamē. (II–10–3)

Translation

My mind, better desist from deeds futile
And reach the mount beside Māliruñ Cōlai, lovely and fertile,
Surrounded by many an enchanting orchard,
The favourite resort of the cloud-hued Lord.

Notes

(i) In the last two stanzas, the Āḻvār expatiated on the glory of the Pilgrim centre, Known as ' Māliruñ cōlai ', treating one's visit to that place or mere meditation of the station as an end in itself. And now, the Āḻvār extends the same treatment even to another mount in its vicinity, by virtue of its associaton with 'Māliruñcōlai Malai '.

(ii) The futile deeds, referred to, are rites and rituals performed for attaining swarga etc, or even contemplation of the Lord's transcendent glory and the by-gone Avatāras. The emphasis thus rests on this pilgrim centre which is now getting broad-based so as to include the neighbouring mountain, as well.

karuma vaṉ pācam kaḻittu uḻaṉṟu uyyavē,
perumalai eṭuttāṉ pīṭu uṟai kōyil,
varu maḻai tavaḻum māliruñcōlait
tirumalaiatuvē, aṭaivatu tiṟamē. (II–10–4)

Translation

Going over to Māliruñ cōlai is real good,
Where the rain-clouds crawl and dwells the Lord
For ever, for us to serve Him and get undone
Our ' *Kārmik* ' bonds tough; His person does the glory beam
Of His great deliverance of Mount (Govardhan)

Note

To extricate ourselves from the otherwise inextricable bondage of ' Karma ' and to serve the Lord, the Āḻvār deems it but proper that we should reach this sacred hill where the Lord stays for ever, with great delight. That He is the great deliverer is writ large on the person of Lord Aḻakar enshrined

there, proclaiming His great glory as the deliverer of the inhabitants of the pastoral village of Gokula from the fury of Indra, by holding aloft Mount Govardhana for a whole week during His Avatāra as Kṛṣṇa.

tiṟam-uṭai valattāl tīviṉai perukkātu,
aṟam muyal āḻip paṭaiyavaṉ kōyil,
maṟu il vaṇ cuṉai cūḻ māliruñcōlaip
puṟamalai, cārap pōvatu kiṟiyē. (II–10–5)

Translation

Do not your energy dissipate and your sins multiply,
Better go to the mount close to Māliruñ Cōlai,
Surrounded by cascades, neat and lovely,
Where stays the Lord, bent on protection
Of His devotees, holding the discus, that benevolent weapon.

Note

The Āḻvār brings on a par with 'Māliruñ Cōlai malai' another mount around. He advises that all one's energy, that might otherwise be dissipated on selfish pursuits breeding endless sins, could as well be used up in going on a pilgrimage to the said mount.

kiṟi eṉa niṉaimiṉ! kīḻmai ceyyātē,
uṟi amar veṇṇey uṇṭavaṉ kōyil,
maṟiyoṭu piṇai cēr māliruñcōlai–
neṟi paṭa atuvē, niṉaivatu nalamē. (II–10–6)

Translation

Desist from base deeds and remember
'Tis good to think solely of traversing the road
Which leads to Māliruñ Cōlai where live together
Herds of deer and young ones and stays our Lord,
Who from hanging hoops ate up all the butter.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār advises people to divert the mind from sensual pleasures and *fix it on the route leading to 'Māliruñ Cōlai'* where Lord Kṛṣṇa stays on, to grant 'darśan' to us, the post-incarnation beneficiaries.

(ii) Even as the deer and the young ones stay together, it behoves us to stay on with the Lord, our eternal Father and Mother, rolled into one.

nalam eṉa niṉaimiṉ! naraku aḻuntātē,
nilam muṉam iṭantāṉ nīṭu uṟai kōyil,
malam aṟu mati cēr māliruñcōlai,
valam muṟai eyti maruvutal valamē. (II–10–7)

Translation

It would be best if you got yourself attached,
With due reverence, to Māliruñ Cōlai where shines
The Moon clear and dwells the Lord Who once
Redeemed the Earth (as the Boar unique); better teach
Your mind this advice good, let it not dredge in hell.

Notes

(i) Going to hell does not mean that those who somehow fail to visit this pilgrim centre will go to hell. To be in conjunction with the Lord, as Sītā put it to Śrī Rāma before setting out for exile, is Swarga while being away from Him is hell. The emphasis here is, therefore, on not getting parted from the Lord.

(ii) The Moon's blemishes having been removed by his rubbing against the hill-top of this station, he is shining quite clear.

(iii) "*With due reverence*": duly realising the inter-relationship between Man and God.

valañceytu, vaikal valam kaḻiyātē,
valañceyyum āya–māyavaṉ kōyil,
valañceyyum vāṉōr māliruñcōlai,
valañceytu nāḷum maruvutal vaḻakkē. (II–10–8)

Translation

Acquire strength all right but waste it never,
Better go round daily Māliruñ Cōlai where stands enshrined

The wondrous shepherd (Kṛṣṇa), our great Benefactor
And the Celestials come down and move around.

Notes

(1) The Lord gives Himself unto His devotees, besides the strength to enjoy the rapport with Him. Lord Aḻakar Himself goes round Mount Māliruñcōlai, in the company of His Consorts, even as Śrī Rāma and Sītā went round, hand in hand, the mountain slopes of Citrakūṭa.

Even as the citizens of Ayodhyā followed Śrī Rāma when he went into exile, the Celestials do come to this pilgrim centre and circumambulate the temple of Aḻakar. It would indeed be a grievous misuse of the specially endowed human body, highly conducive to holding communion with the Lord and serving Him in a number of ways, if it strayed into the domain of sensual pleasures, thus moving in the opposite direction.

(ii) Nañcīyar is said to have related from personal experience how he observed Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar and Piḷḷai Tirunarayūr Arayar, leisurely pacing about the premises of the temples, gazing at the tall turrets and the lovely mansions around, in short, imbibing every small detail, literally drinking them in, with their eyes. This was in dire contrast to the men of the world to whom visiting temples is a mere formality, moving about like race-horses, as if it is a place more to hurry from. For the great Savants to whom the Lord is at once the Means and the End, temples are places to stay and serve. No doubt, genuflections and circumambulations do not serve as the ' Means ' for them and yet, they get absorbed in the sanctity of the temples and their surroundings, as an end in itself.

vaḻakku eṉa niṉaimiṉ, valviṉai mūḻkātu;
aḻakkoṭi aṭṭāṉ amar perunkōyil,
maḻak kaḷiṟṟu iṉam cēr māliruñcōlai,
toḻak karutuvatē tuṇivatu cūtē. (II–10–9)

Translation

Get not immersed in dire sins,
Take this advice just and wholesome,
' Tis best that you firmly resolve to worship
Māliruñ Cōlai where elephants young herd up
And there is the huge temple of the Lord,
Who, the devil of a woman destroyed.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār says, it would suffice even if one just resolved to worship this pilgrim centre.

(ii) The devil of a woman referred to here is Pūtanā.

(iii) Speaking about the herds of young elephants mustering here in strength, Nampiḷḷai observes that it is no wonder that the Lord (Aḻakar) standing like an elephant, Young and majestic, (Cōlai Maḻakkaḷiṟu) as Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār appreciates the Deity, attracts thousands of elephants.

cūtu eṉṟu kaḷavum cūtum ceyyātē,
vētam muṉ virittāṉ virumpiya kōyil,
mātu uṟu mayil cēr māliruñcōlaip
pōtu aviḻ malaiyē, pukuvatu poruḷē. (II–10–10)

Translation

Giving up gambling and thieving as means of subsistence,
Get into Mount Māliruñcōlai, your final goal
Where flowers are in full bloom and lovely peacocks, in pairs, revel
And there is the temple where the Lord lovingly stays,
Who did elaborate the contents of the Scriptures, long back.

Notes

(i) ' Thieving ' refers to ' *Ātma apahāra* ', the stealing of the Soul, looking upon ourselves as our own Masters ignoring the fundamental fact that we belong to the Lord.

(ii) *Gambling*: indulging in quibblings to put people on the wrong track and dissuade them from believing in the existence of God, good and bad, and things of that sort.

(iii) Long, long ago, the Lord disseminated the Vedas, unseen, and later on, as Lord Kṛṣṇa, He expounded their inner meanings, right from the chariot on the battlefield; Bhagavad Gitā is but a restatement of the central teachings of the Upaniṣhaḍs.

(iv) The Lord loves to stay in this pilgrim centre, just to attract, by His exquisite charm, those not amenable to His advice (upadeśa).

(v) *Final Goal*: Going to Māliruñcōlai is an end in itself.

poruḷ eṉṟu iv ulakam paṭaittavaṉ pukaḻmēl
maruḷ il vaṇ kurukūr vaṇ caṭakōpaṉ
teruḷ koḷḷac coṉṉa ōr āyirattuḷ ip pattu
aruḷuṭaiyavaṉ–tāḷ aṇaivikkum muṭittē. (II–10–11)

Translation

These ten songs out of the thousand imparted
By mighty Caṭakōpaṉ of famous Kurukūr, with clarity great,
Shedding on us knowledge, clear and concise, about the Lord
Of many an auspicious trait, Who the worlds did hopefully create,
Will cut out *Samsāra* and put us at His merciful feet.

Notes

(i) As already explained in II-9-11, what is meant here again is that the Lord will be immensely pleased with those who learn these ten songs and confer on them the benefits referred to here.

(ii) The Lord endowed us with limbs and sense-organs so as to capacitate us into a career of gainful activity. This is what is meant by creation and He goes on with it, undaunted by adverse results, always hoping for better luck, an indefatigable Cultivator, with robust optimism.

THE CENTUM, IN RETROSPECT (DECAD-WISE SUMMARY)

(II-1): The traumatic experience of the Saint, longing for the external (physical) perception of the Lord and stung by the poignancy of separation from that priceless blue-gem, the darling of the celestials, described by him in I-10-11, is set out in vivid colours *in the first decad;* thrown into a state of deep dejection, the Āḻvār stands transformed once again as a forlorn female lover;

(II-2): The erstwhile gloom of the God-lover, sunk deep in dejection, is found to have vanished, *in toto, in the second decad*, consequent upon his exhilarating union with the Lord, the pendulum having swung to the other end; in such an exultant mood, the Saint highlights the Lord's supremacy vis-a-vis Brahmā and Rudra, the possible contenders for this position of eminence, in the light of the wondrous deeds performed by the Lord during His incarnations;

(II-3): *In the third decad*, the Saint gives vent to the joy of his reunion with the enchanting Lord, an inexhaustible fountain of bliss;

(II-4): *In the fourth decad*, we see the Āḻvār, thrown into deep dejection back again, inasmuch as his longing for entry into the gatherings of the devotees and singing profusely the glory of the Lord in their steadfast company, did not materialise; assuming once again the overtones of a frustrated lover. The Nāyakī's grief is too deep for words and the gnostic mother comes on the scene and seeks clarification from the Lord as to what He proposes to do with the poor little victim, her daughter;

(II-5): Beholding, once again, the joyous Lord in all His splendour and paraphernalia, the Saint feels immensely delighted and narrates his ecstatic experience, *in the fifth decad;* the Lord meets the aspiration of the Āḻvār by conferring on him the heavenly bliss longed for by him, right here;

(II-6): *In the sixth decad*, the Āḻvār hastens to assure the Lord that he shall not part from Him any more, finding Him at the height of His joy of union with him but nevertheless apprehensive of the possibility of his slipping away, overwhelmed by His transcendent glory;

(II-7): *In the seventh decad*, the Āḻvār expatiates on the extraordinary benevolence of the Lord, in extending His grace to all those associated with him, seven generations back and forth;

(II-8): *In the eighth decad*, the Āḻvār, swayed by boundless compassion for the suffering humanity, turns round and advises them to get into the Divine fold, taking due note of the fact that the Lord is the one and only granter of Mokṣa, the final bliss, ridding them of their terrific involvement in the dreadful cycle of birth and death; (This is the second time the Āḻvār addresses the world, the first was in I-2.)

(II-9): *In the ninth decad* the Āḻvār pinpoints the concept of ' Puruṣārta ', the ultimate value or final goal of every individual, the emphasis resting on the Lord's voluntary dispensation, out of His free will and spontaneous grace, individual gratification of one's own desire receding to the background altogether; what a lofty train of thought, totally bereft of egoistic impulses and putting the entire weight on the Lord!

(II-10): *In the concluding decad of this Centum*, the Āḻvār exhorts people to propitiate the hilarious Mount Tirumāliruñcōlai (near Mathurai, in Tamiḻ Nāḍu) his predilections extending even to the other hills, in and around and the very route leading thereto; the Āḻvār advises people to go to this pilgrim centre, while still young and before the sensual pleasures get hold of the rising youth and distract it.

ERRATA (Vol. I)

PAGE	LINE	
1	1	*For* decades *read as* decads.
1	7	*For* Divnie *read as* Divine.
2	7	Insert the following after ' say ' " that God is the fountain-source of infinite bliss ".
8	8	(From bottom *For* him *read as* Him.
15		Foot-note insert ? at the end.
18	4	(From bottom) *For* being *read as* Being.
23	15	(From bottom) *For* Those *read as* To, those
,,	11	(From bottom) insert ' by ' after ' sought '.
26	10	Delete, before ' calls '.
31	8	*For* wearing *read as* weaning.
32	12	Delete ' the ' at the beginning.
50	11	Substitute, for ! and ! for, at the end.
76	6	(From bottom) Shift the, before ' fit '.
80	13	Insert) before ' peerless ' and delete) at the end.
81	11	(From bottom) insert , before ' of '.
87	10	(From bottom) insert , before ' to '.
89	9	(From bottom) insert , after ' operates '.
91	4	Insert , after ' mind '.
101	2	*For* Discuss *read as* Discus.
105	12	*For* demons *read as* demon's.
110	19	(Forms part of line 18) *For* He *read as* he.
114	Last	*For* It *read as* I.
136	3	(From bottom) *For* apired *read as* aspired.
158	20	Substitute! for full-stop at the end.
160	5	Insert full-stop after (Yāmuna).
161	14	*For* vallaikaṉ *read as* vallaikāṉ.
163	8	Insert , after ' his '.
168	5	Insert , after ' of '.
172	8	*For* with *read as* within.
176	10	(From bottom) *For* of *read as* or.
183	17	*For* Fancied *read as* fancied.
191	15	Delete) before ' as '.
,,	16	Substitute) for, after ' Deity '.